

Moving and Moving Forward: Mushuau Innu Relocation from Davis Inlet to Natuashish

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Cet article fait appel au travail de recherche participative et de développement communautaire que l'auteur a réalisé pendant une période de quatre ans (2001-2005) en tant que membre d'une équipe de renforcement des capacités créée pour aider à la relocalisation des Innus Mushuau de Davis Inlet, au Labrador, à la nouvelle localité de Natuashish en 2002-2003. Il s'intéresse particulièrement aux défis qu'a dû relever la Natuashish Housing Authority, qui était chargée de mettre en œuvre les politiques relatives aux nouveaux logements. L'article se termine par une évaluation de l'impact de la relocalisation de la communauté des Innus Mushuau et les leçons tirées de l'expérience.

This paper draws upon the author's participatory research and community development work conducted over a four-year period (2001-2005) as a member of a capacity-building team established to support the relocation of the Mushuau Innu of Labrador from Davis Inlet to the new community of Natuashish in 2002-2003. Particular attention is devoted to the challenges faced by the Natuashish Housing Authority, which was assigned the task of implementing policies with respect to the new housing. The paper concludes with an assessment of the impact of the relocation on the Mushuau Innu community and the lessons learned from the experience.

WHEN THE CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION (CBC) televised images of Innu youth sniffing gasoline in Davis Inlet in the winter of 1993, Canadians were embarrassed and outraged. The CBC reports caught the attention of international journalists who further raised the profile of this small Labrador community. As a result of media investigations, the governments of Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada came under considerable pressure to take seriously the Innu demands for help which, a year earlier, had reached a new intensity when a house fire in Davis Inlet resulted in the deaths of six children. In response to this tragedy, the distraught but mobilized Innu community held a People's Inquiry to look at the root causes of the house fire. Relocation to a new place on the mainland of Labrador was identified during the inquiry as one of the strategies toward healing and renewal. In 1993, the community endorsed, through a referendum, a proposal by the Mushuau Innu Band Council for relocation.

A new community was constructed at Sango Bay. Known locally as "Natuashish",

it is located approximately 295 km north of Happy Valley/Goose Bay and 15 km west of Davis Inlet on the mainland coast of Labrador. The first phase of the construction of the new community was conducted over a six-year period, from 1997 to 2003, and included the design and building of an entirely new town site and all supporting infrastructure such as roads, an airstrip and a wharf for the approximately 700 people in the community. Despite construction delays, the first group of residents – 30 families out of 150 families – moved from Davis Inlet to Natuashish in December 2002 and the move was completed over the next 12 months. Seventy homes were completed by the time of the first move and 133 homes in total were constructed by the end of 2003.

The Mushuau Innu relocation became one of the most expensive and infamous relocations of an Aboriginal community in Canadian history. Costs rose from an estimated \$82 million in 1996 to over \$152 million at the time of the move in December 2002 (INAC, 2004). While many believe that the increased expenditure was necessary for the success of the project, the move has far from completely solved the community's problems. The specific circumstances are unique, but the serious social and economic challenges experienced by the Mushuau Innu are common in many northern communities and Canadian Aboriginal communities in particular. Complex barriers to increasing or regaining quality of life in these communities run along political, cultural, policy and economic lines and have important physical and environmental dimensions as well. In the case of the Mushuau Innu, for example, the federal government's imposed governance system requiring election of a single chief and council does not reflect the traditional Innu family-based hierarchy. The new political processes erode solidarity as the community struggles for fair treatment.

More generally, many of the root causes of physical health deterioration and communal problems can be traced to the loss of cultural continuity in daily life. For the Mushuau Innu this continuity was disrupted when their traditionally nomadic life was forcibly changed to a settled existence in increasingly crowded and poorly serviced communities. Lack of employment and income options as well as government-imposed policies – including those related to education and social assistance – did not allow the Innu to spend significant time hunting or foraging in their traditional territories. In addition, these traditional Innu territories are being used for military and resource-extraction purposes. While the remote northern location defined the life of the Mushuau Innu for centuries, this geographic and environmental setting in modern times becomes problematic, especially with regard to the adequate and timely provision of goods, materials and services.

This article is about what was learned – and what is still being learned – from the Mushuau Innu relocation experience up to 2005. It assesses, in particular, the establishment, performance and capacity-building efforts of the Natuashish Housing Authority (NHA), an organization charged with planning, delivering and managing the Mushuau Innu housing. The analysis is based on findings from four years (2001-2005) of participatory research and community-development work in Davis Inlet and Natuashish conducted as a member of a multi-stakeholder support team established to assist the relocation effort. The article begins with a brief discussion of Aboriginal community relocations in Canada and the experience of the Mushuau Innu to the time of this most recent relocation. The subsequent section describes the approaches to research and information gathering undertaken in Davis Inlet and later in Natuashish.

The ensuing discussion follows the chronological sequence of events surrounding the community's move. It starts with the planning of the relocation, explores the community's reactions to the new homes and reflects on the actual move. Particular attention is given to the challenges faced by the housing authority and the priorities it established during its formative period between 2002 and 2005. The paper concludes with an assessment of the impact of the relocation on the Mushuau Innu community and the lessons learned from the experience. It acknowledges the benefits of the relocation, but it also recognizes the challenges that the community still faces.

Relocations in Canada

Since the beginnings of permanent European settlement in "Canada" in the 17th century, Aboriginal communities have experienced the negative effects of displacement from their traditional dwelling, hunting and fishing grounds. This displacement included restrictions on the use and changes in the territories of Aboriginal homelands as a result of land-purchase agreements, treaty-making processes and the establishment of reserves, beginning in the 18th century. Since Confederation in 1867 and the passage of the Indian Act of 1876, the displacement of Aboriginal people has often taken the form of deliberate initiatives by federal governments to move particular Aboriginal communities for administrative or development purposes.¹ According to the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP) released in 1996, most of these relocations must be seen as part of a broader process of dispossession and displacement, a process with lingering effects on the cultural, spiritual, social, economic and political aspects of people's lives. The main problems identified by the commission included the government's overall attitude of paternalism and its arbitrary use of power. Decisions were often made with little or no consultation and many of these "planned" administrative and developmental relocations were undertaken on short notice (RCAP, 1996, vol. II, chapter 11, p. 3).

It is important to acknowledge that the practice of relocation was common and that relocations took place throughout Canada. Aboriginal communities from Tsulquate and Burns Lake in British Columbia to Makkovik, Nutak, Hebron and Davis Inlet in Labrador were affected by the process. For the Mushuau Innu, the move to Natuashish was the third relocation that they had experienced in less than 60 years. The first took place in 1948, a year before the Canadian government assumed fiduciary responsibility for Aboriginal communities in Newfoundland and Labrador and a second relocation took place in the late 1960s (RCAP, 1996, vol. II, chap. 11, pp. 5-7).

In discussing criteria and standards that should guide future relocations, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples stressed the necessity of ensuring that: 1)

1 Although there have been many reasons for relocation, and these reasons cannot always be neatly separated, the moves can be grouped into the two main categories: administrative relocation and developmental relocation. Administrative relocations are moves carried out to facilitate the operation of government or to address the perceived needs of Aboriginal people. Developmental relocations have a long history and have been used frequently around the world as a rationale for population transfer. Developmental relocations have often been related to agricultural expansion and land reclamation, urban development and hydroelectric projects. See RCAP, 1996, vol. II, chap. 11, pp. 5-7.

appropriate authority is obtained by government before proceeding with relocation; 2) those to be relocated provide their informed consent to the relocation; 3) the relocation is properly and carefully planned, carried out and supervised; 4) the promises made are kept; and 5) the relocation is carried out with consideration for, and respect shown to, those being moved (RCAP, 1996, vol. I, p. 117). These criteria represent an important and historically situated reference for the assessment of contemporary Aboriginal relocations and apply, in particular, in a case such as the third administrative relocation of the Mushuau Innu in December 2002.

The Mushuau Innu of Labrador

For 6,000 years or more the Innu had been nomadic hunters, traversing the interior region of the Labrador/Ungava Peninsula, which encompasses virtually all of Labrador and a significant portion of northern and eastern Québec north of the St. Lawrence River (Ryan, 1988, p. 4). The Mushuau Innu are part of the larger Innu population that currently includes approximately 16,000 members living in 13 communities in Labrador and Québec (Samson, 2003, pp. 70-1). The Innu of Labrador number about 1,600 and live primarily in two communities: Natuashish and Sheshatshiu. They are represented politically by an organization called the Innu Nation.

In the mid-1920s, during a cycle when the caribou were particularly sparse, the Mushuau Innu began to spend their summers along the shores of Davis Inlet and Voisey's Bay (Henriksen, 1994, pp. 5-6), the former of which was also the site of the Hudson's Bay Company trading post. In 1948, Newfoundland authorities closed this trading post at Davis Inlet and moved the Mushuau Innu to Nutak, about 400 kilometres north on the Labrador coast. This move was undertaken without community consultation or consent. A year later, the Mushuau Innu, unhappy with the new arrangement because it was so far away from traditional hunting grounds, walked back to Davis Inlet. In 1967, at the urging of the local priest,² several government officials and Innu chief Joe Rich, 150 Innu were moved about four kilometers away to a new Davis Inlet (Utshimasits), on Iluikoyak Island, where they lived on a year-round basis (Backhouse and McRae, 2002 and Roche, 1992b).

After Newfoundland and Labrador joined Confederation in 1949, the federal government began to build new houses for the Innu. The houses were small (750 square feet), built close together and had few amenities. While equipped with tubs, toilets and sinks, the houses had no water or sewage services, few pieces of furniture

2 The Roman Catholic Church, along with provincial and federal governments, has played an important role in shaping the lives of the Innu. By the late-19th century, Labrador Innu received sporadic summer visits from Catholic missionaries – initially from the diocese of Québec and later from Harbour Grace (Tanner, 1998, p. 242). Missionaries converted many Innu to Roman Catholicism and were among the first to supply the colonial government with information about Aboriginal people in Labrador, including the Innu. According to Colin Samson (2003, p. 29), 20th-century missionaries were instrumental in encouraging Innu settlement in order to promote not only the “orderly establishment of relations among the congregated Innu, but between them and the state and Church”. The first Innu chief, Joe Rich, was appointed by Father Edward O'Brien in the 1920s and, according to Samson, the chief “unwittingly became an instrument of the priest” (see also Henriksen, 1973, p. 97-8).

and a single power outlet. Many families used hot plates or diesel fuel to start fires to warm their homes (Innu Nation, 1995). Gradually, the residents of Davis Inlet found themselves slipping out of touch with their traditional migratory way of life while having difficulty fully embracing a “modern”, sedentary lifestyle.

The slow but steady disengagement of the Innu from their traditional hunting grounds and migratory lifestyles accelerated in the 1960s with settlement in the new Davis Inlet. According to the recollections of community member George Rich (2000), some of the last long-distance trips by dog team to hunt caribou were made by community families in the 1960s (see also Henriksen, 1973). The opening of a school in the 1960s made it more difficult for children to learn the hunting way of life and the Innu language. As “the church school, Social Service, clinic, store and RCMP” began to change their lives, rates of substance abuse, alcoholism and family violence increased (Innu Nation, 1995). Meanwhile, many changes were taking place on and around traditional Innu hunting and burial grounds. In the 1970s, a hydroelectric development at Churchill Falls flooded thousands of hectares of land. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the Innu fought against the introduction of low-level military flight training over caribou and waterfowl habitat. And in the same period that the third relocation initiative was being conceived and realized, natural-resource exploitation intensified following the discovery in 1994 of one of the richest nickel deposits in the world at Voisey’s Bay.³ The rapid pace of development in the area gave the Innu community little time to adapt to the new reality of corporations and governments transforming the local landscape.

The 1949 Terms of Union and Jurisdictional Difficulties

In addition to being repeatedly relocated, the Mushuau Innu, along with the Inuit and Mi’kmaq in Newfoundland and Labrador, experienced particular jurisdictional difficulties (Hanrahan, 2003, p. 211). The 1949 Terms of Union under which Newfoundland and Labrador entered Confederation made no reference to Aboriginal peoples, although the matter had been discussed during the negotiations between the representatives of Newfoundland and Canada (Backhouse and McRae, 2002; Samson, 2003, pp. 54-6; Roche, 1992a). A special bilateral committee on the future status of Newfoundland’s Aboriginal peoples in Confederation concluded that the Mi’kmaq, Innu and Inuit in the new province should be brought fully under federal jurisdiction, but this failed to happen. Since the province had no reserves and its Native peoples had recently exercised the right to vote, the introduction of the Indian Act would have raised politically awkward questions. Instead, it was agreed that the province would administer Native affairs with grants from Ottawa. As Adrian Tanner (1998, p. 238) argues, Canada and Newfoundland missed an opportunity in 1949 to pioneer a better Native policy. As a result, the Innu claim – with some justification – that for more

3 The Voisey’s Bay deposit is a vast sulphide ore body containing rich nickel, copper and cobalt resources. A total investment of approximately \$3 billion will be made in mining and processing in Newfoundland and Labrador over the estimated 30-year life of the project. According to the Voisey’s Bay Nickel Company Limited, the project employed over 800 individuals in 2005 (<http://www.vbnc.com>). A number of Innu and Inuit from the surrounding communities are employed by the company.

than half a century the federal government refused to recognize its constitutional obligations and that this has resulted in a continuing failure on the part of governments, both provincial and federal, to provide them with the level and quality of services received by other Aboriginal peoples in Canada. While First Nations status in Newfoundland and Labrador is now being achieved slowly and in a piecemeal fashion, the lack of action by the provincial and federal governments in terms of assuming their constitutionally binding responsibility has had lasting negative repercussions on Aboriginal well-being (Backhouse and McRae, 2002; Hanrahan, 2003).

Research Approach

As planning and construction work in the new community began, it became evident that there was a need for focused support for Innu governance during the relocation. Most importantly, the people of Natuashish needed good policies and processes in place to manage their new housing stock. A portion of the relocation funding was therefore allocated to the creation of a stakeholder support team to undertake various community capacity-building activities. Established in 2001, the team included representatives from federal and provincial governments, private sector groups, academic institutions and various First Nations organizations.⁴ My membership on this support team, as a representative of Mount Allison University's Rural and Small Town Programme, gave me direct contact with the Innu community and the Natuashish Housing Authority staff and board members, and provided many opportunities to visit Davis Inlet and Natuashish. Research-related interviews with community members were conducted in conjunction with meetings held to help the NHA to develop its housing policies and procedures documents. The interviews themselves served, at that time, as a "stock taking" and reflection tool. They helped NHA board members, NHA staff and government representatives to refine their approach to reaching specific developmental goals and to articulate more effectively ideas for dealing with logistical, social and political challenges. Carefully timed interviews were also designed to aid stakeholders in building organizational/institutional memory. Interviews were scheduled to complement many capacity-building tasks undertaken by the team members, including the development and review of the housing authority's documents as well as various meetings and workshops. The interviews gave many Innu community members an opportunity to discuss their immediate concerns and reflect on the broader political and cultural contexts and the community's history. My participant observation and journal-keeping informed the work of the support team. A great deal was also learned from the community through my being involved in practical work such as conducting housing board and staff workshops, developing staff job descriptions and initiating a resident life-skills counseling programme. The life-skills counseling programme, for

4 Representatives were from the following organizations: Innovative Business Alliance Corporation, Sydney, Nova Scotia (NS); Turtle Island Associates, Ontario; Ki'Knu Housing, NS; Health and Community Services Department, Miawpukek First Nation, Newfoundland and Labrador (NL); Aboriginal Housing Inspectors from Paq'tnkek First Nation, NS and Indian Brook First Nation, NS; Rural and Small Town Programme, Mount Allison University, New Brunswick; Labrador School Board; Health Canada, Labrador Secretariat; and other provincial and federal agencies and departments.

instance, involved teaching Innu families safe use and basic maintenance of appliances in their new homes. They learned about washing machines, dryers and electric stoves and how to properly monitor air exchange systems and water heaters.

This approach to research on the relocation was important because the story of the relocation had to be told in a way that was useful to those willing to learn from it.⁵ Several specific tools were used for data collection: participant observation; involvement in consultations, meetings and group discussions; group and individual key informant interviews (with community leaders, community members, professionals involved in the relocation project and government representatives); and analysis of a range of relevant documents such as internal correspondence, media reports and research studies. Between September 2003 and September 2004, 18 in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of several key stakeholder groups: the Natuashish community leadership and band council; the NHA staff; the federal government and private sector organizations involved in implementing and managing the relocation initiative; professionals engaged in the construction work; and community service providers living in Natuashish. All interviews were anonymous. Some names and events referenced in these interviews were omitted from this paper to avoid exacerbating political and social tensions in an already charged environment.

Before the Move: Relocation Planning

Plans for the new community of Natuashish began to take shape in the early 1990s as media reports detailed how unbearable life was in Davis Inlet. In 1994 the federal and provincial governments made a formal commitment to support and fund relocation to a mainland site of the community's choice. From a distance, it appeared that the suicide attempts in 1993 by several young people precipitated the Innu demand that their community be relocated, but relocation had been actively pursued by the Davis Inlet Innu for many years (Press, 1995). In March 1992, the Mushuau Innu had

5 The case study research approach and elements of the Standard Logic Model and Temporal Logic Model of programme evaluation were used in documentation and analysis of the relocation (Gasper, 1997; den Hayer, 2002). The Standard Logic Model was invented in the 1960s by a team of consultants led by Leon Rosenberg (Gasper, 1997). Over the last 40 years it has become part of standard procedure for programme and project management and evaluation at various Canadian and international agencies and organizations. Despite slight variations in terminology and structure, the purpose of a logic model is to illustrate the programme's/project's components and how they logically link together. A logic model is also used to measure the success of the programme/project against its original plans (see den Hayer, 2002). Although current logic models can be continuously revised to reflect new programme realities, they do not capture the fluid motion with which the programme/project adapts to a chaotic environment, the contributing factors, nor the evolving stakeholder learning. In order to address this issue, the International Development Research Centre's (IDRC) Evaluation Unit has researched and developed an alternative logic model that could include programme/project responsiveness to environmental changes and the organizational learning process. This alternative model, the Temporal Logic Model (TLM), achieves this goal through periodically recording contextual changes, making an interim assessment and integrating any subsequent modification (see den Hayer, 2002). The evaluation completed in relation to the Mushuau Innu relocation helped to measure the initiative's interim outcomes against its original plans. In addition to measuring outputs against inputs in this complex undertaking, an evaluation of the learning process was incorporated to allow for a better understanding of emerging interim strategic possibilities and possible future directions for the NHA and other community stakeholders.

organized a community consultation process called a “Peoples Inquiry” in which they probed some of the causes of the social disintegration in the community. The Innu created a seven-point plan for change, which, among other healing and renewal measures, included the relocation. It was believed that such a move would help the Innu regain “their spiritual power”, their “social and psychological health”, and their “collective identity and self-esteem” (Henriksen, 1993). Key practical reasons articulated in support of the relocation included: 1) the rapid expansion of the Mushuau Innu population; 2) the lack of additional land for community expansion; 3) the steadily deteriorating supply of safe drinking water; 4) the need to improve radically the community’s infrastructure and living conditions; and 5) the poor access to the mainland and the community’s traditional hunting grounds – Iluikoyak Island was accessible only by air at least four months per year (Innu Nation, 1995).

In 1994 the Mushuau Innu Band Council (MIBC) and provincial and federal governments reached an agreement to provide necessary funding for the relocation of the community and signed a Statement of Political Commitments. Several socio-economic and technical studies were undertaken following the signing of this agreement (Whitford Environment Ltd. 1994; Arcéos Inc., 1996). According to the findings in some of these studies, it was impossible to supply the Davis Inlet community with adequate running water from wells on the island. Indeed, the estimated cost of establishing a source of fresh water on the mainland and piping that water to the community was higher than relocating Mushuau Innu to an entirely new community (Wilkinson, 1995). In a 1995 study commissioned by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Wilkinson and Masella evaluated several sites for the new Innu village. Little Sango Pond (Natuashish) was chosen as the preferred location. The Mushuau Innu Relocation Agreement (MIRA) between the Mushuau Innu of Davis Inlet and the Canadian government, finalized in 1996, outlined the parameters and financial arrangements for the project, which included a requirement on the Innu side to adopt a long-term comprehensive community plan that addressed social and high-unemployment problems in the new community at Sango Bay. The Innu were to ensure, through proper feasibility and technical studies, that the new town site was technically and environmentally viable and that the cost of construction of the new town and the relocation was “reasonable” and reflected the initial estimate of \$82 million (INAC, http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/info/info62_e.html).

On 29 October 1996, an overwhelming 97 per cent of Mushuau Innu voted to approve the Mushuau Innu Relocation Agreement and directed the Mushuau Innu Band Council to sign it. The MIRA was signed in Utshimassits on 13 November 1996 by Chief Katie (Kiti) Rich, Ron Irwin, minister responsible for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), and Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Brian Tobin. As part of this agreement, regressive federal and provincial programmes were “devolved” or gradually eliminated and new initiatives were put in place to promote the renewal of Innu health, culture, society and economy. The preamble to the agreement included a clause that confirmed the status of the Mushuau Innu as “Indians within the meaning of section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867” (quoted in Backhouse and McRae, 2002, p. 2).

The province agreed to provide the land for the new community through a 20-year renewable lease, with the potential of a future transfer of land to the Innu resulting from land claim negotiations. The Canadian government agreed to provide funding

for relocation planning, design and site construction at an estimated cost of \$82 million. Federal authorities anticipated that this amount would cover the cost of wood-frame houses, water and sewer systems and roads as well as a power station, a school, a nursing station, an airport, a wharf, a post office, a band council office, and police and fire facilities. This estimate also included moving expenses and the cost of decommissioning of the Davis Inlet site (Backhouse and McRae, 2002).

In addition to the signing of the Mushuau Innu Relocation Agreement, several important initiatives were undertaken in 1996 that had a significant influence on the relocation process. These initiatives included the development of a community relocation plan, the creation of a relocation negotiation team that included Mushuau Innu and provincial and federal government representatives, and the establishment of a smaller Mushuau Innu Relocation Committee that was to provide Innu input. Under the terms of the MIRA, the goal was to involve Innu in the construction and provide employment and training opportunities (Backhouse and McRae, 2002 p. 31).

Relocation Accomplished

Construction-related work on the new site started shortly after the signing of the agreement. As the first trees were cut, land was prepared and geological and archeological surveys were conducted on the new site. There was also significant time and energy devoted to handling contracts, dealing with the media and preparing briefings for high-ranking federal government officials. The actual community move began six years later, in December 2002. The Innu were not all moved at the same time since only 70 of the 133 planned homes were ready for occupancy that December. According to the main contractor, Davis Engineering Inc., delays in construction were due primarily to the short shipping season for building supplies and furnishings. Despite the lack of housing the move went ahead as scheduled. The relocation date had been set and the political pressure was heavy on those charged with delivering the accommodations on time and as promised. During the official move, a number of Innu families stayed behind in Davis Inlet. Others shared homes on the new site with their fellow community members for several months. The remaining 63 planned homes were completed by the end of 2003. The relocation alleviated the chronic housing shortage for a while, but the rapidly growing Innu population needed additional homes for its young families and accommodations for teachers, nurses, the RCMP and other service providers. In 2003, the Mushuau Innu and the federal government reached an agreement to construct 71 additional homes for community members over the following two years.

Reactions to the New Homes

Despite the delays, the new, modern homes built in Natuashish represented a considerable improvement over accommodations in Davis Inlet. Still, some community members believe that the homes could have been better suited to their needs. Although input relating to community-specific housing needs and preferences had been gathered from the Innu, not all of this feedback was integrated into the design of the actual town site.

Before the construction started, the Mushuau Innu had been presented with the town layout, several home designs and colour choices. Many Innu liked what they saw. According to two women interviewed in the community, the new homes seemed

“nice”, “warm” and “well built” (Anonymous, 2003, February 23). Similar sentiments were expressed in other interviews with community members conducted before and after the relocation. The blue, gray and burgundy-coloured modern bungalows and split entry homes could easily blend into many Canadian residential neighbourhoods. Others, however, had a different opinion. Kajetan Rich, for instance, who persisted in unofficially “re-designing” his own home to suit his family’s needs as it was being built by the local construction crew, argued that Natuashish’s first homes were too “conventional” and that future housing should better reflect the Innu lifestyle and culture: “I tried to fight for some design changes for my own home with no success; then I went to the site as my home was being built and asked construction workers to change the location of walls, remove some partitions (with no real extra cost involved); however, not everyone had an opportunity to do so; even things such as the orientation of the house (facing East) is important to our culture, but it is not accounted for in the current design criteria”. Rich explains that “some families bring their caribou from the hunt right to the kitchen” and that “the engineers who designed these homes did not consider that this is the way things are often done in this community”. The shortcomings in home design included a lack of direct access from outside to a large utility area as well as an overall shortage of supply and equipment storage space. Moreover, house plans did not reflect the importance to Innu families of open, multi-purpose living spaces. Some of these issues could have been resolved, Rich claims, by offering families an on-site design consultation (Rich, 2004, February 24). Writing in 2000, George Rich underscored the uniqueness of the Innu and the fact that “white” society often fails to acknowledge cultural differences. He argues that the Innu know how to build and repair expertly their traditional teepees made of caribou hides and that adopting “modern” home maintenance standards is expected to take some time. The Mushuau Innu culture, he notes, is rooted in a nomadic past that stretches back more than 6,000 years, and Innu have lived in “conventional” houses for only 30 years (Rich, 2000, p 38).

While house-related damage was frequent in Davis Inlet, there has been significantly less damage and vandalism to the new homes. To a stranger visiting Natuashish in 2005, the homes may not look particularly appealing (most of the basement level windows are boarded up to cover or replace broken windows or to avoid breaks), but according to NHA staff and the majority of community residents the homes are in good condition. Aside from some imperfections in appearance, most residences are structurally sound, in good repair and regularly maintained.

Although the homes remain comfortable, the community still lacks indoor and outdoor recreation facilities for both young and older Innu. Such facilities have not been built in Natuashish partly because of disagreement between the Innu and the federal government on funding obligations. In talking about her life in Natuashish, one NHA employee noted that her own children “come back from school and stay inside for the rest of the day” (Rich, 2004, April 15). While the conditions in Davis Inlet were bad, she recalled that it at least had a recreation hall with a multi-purpose room where all sorts of activities were held. Innu women, for instance, could go dancing at the disco in the community while men stayed at home playing cards.

Establishment of the Natuashish Housing Authority

One of the most important institutions in the new community of Natuashish is the Mushuau Innu Housing Authority (MIHA), which was created by the Mushuau Innu

Band Council in 2000. In 2002 the MIHA was renamed the “Natuashish Housing Authority” (NHA) and was granted authority by the Mushuau Innu First Nation (MIFN), which had become, as part of reserve-creation process completed in 2003, the official legal body representing Mushuau Innu. The NHA was to implement the housing policy and to look after all aspects of community development related to existing and future housing assets, and it is accountable to the chief and council. By the time the community finished its relocation, most people knew about the NHA, its mandate and the work it was doing in Natuashish.

The establishment of the NHA was one of the federal government’s conditions for covering the full cost of the new houses in Natuashish. The NHA was to become the organization which, under the guidance of the MIBC, would effectively and sustainably manage the community’s residential assets. One of the vehicles for moving towards maintaining long-term financial sustainability was the establishment and reinforcement of the payment of rents and housing charges. NHA capacity-building was considered a priority (largely by the federal government) as it would enable this organization to garner sufficient revenues for the housing operating budget and eventually reduce the community’s dependence on federal government financial support. Sound housing management and administration practices were expected to reduce housing maintenance and damage-related repair costs and, over time, to promote community awareness of the upkeep costs associated with quality housing. Furthermore, families would learn that paying for some of these services was their own responsibility.

From its inception in 2001, the multi-stakeholder support team worked closely with the housing authority’s board members and staff and Mushuau Innu First Nation leaders to help them achieve their goals. The work started with implementing key elements of the NHA Housing Strategy conceived in 2001 and refined during the following year. These elements included: training of the housing authority board of directors on their respective roles and responsibilities; training the housing authority staff and developing their job descriptions; helping with the implementation of the housing plan, including development of the housing policy and procedures; and implementing a client-orientation (life-skills) programme designed to provide all community residents with skills related to living in, and taking care of, the new housing (INAC, 2002, January).

In the spring of 2003, Sidney Peters was hired as a NHA mentor. By this time the relatively new NHA board and staff had made a transition from planning and preparation to management of the housing in Natuashish. The mentor’s role was to help those involved with the housing authority to cope with their various responsibilities without feeling overwhelmed. An experienced Aboriginal housing professional from mainland Nova Scotia, Peters became widely respected by members of the local community. He helped to facilitate better communication between team members from outside of the community and those from Natuashish. Although based elsewhere, he agreed to stay in the community periodically and help the NHA with its day-to-day work.

In 2005 the NHA organization had its foundations in place. These included a functioning office with full- and part-time staff on duty as well as its own policy, housing procedures and an electronic housing database. The NHA Housing Policy succinctly outlines the general role, operating principles and structure of housing

management in Natuashish. The Housing Procedures document, for its part, contains explicit and detailed operating guidelines allowing the NHA board and staff to undertake various housing management-related duties, including how to allocate new housing, respond to complaints, hire staff and conduct timely housing inspections. The NHA now administers home inspections, maintenance and repairs for all Natuashish residences occupied by community members and service providers. It is also actively involved in the housing planning process for the community and continues to facilitate the life-skills, construction and housing maintenance mentorship, and job-shadowing programmes. The latter allows NHA staff to continuously work with experienced professionals in the areas of financial management, housing repair and housing inspection. Despite these achievements, some of the NHA's capacity-building and overall performance-related initiatives have not been successful and much of the work – including the long-term life-skills programme implementation strategies and partnership-building skills development – has not been fully realized.

NHA's Challenges and Priorities

As with many organizations, one of the critical challenges for the NHA is the lack of resources. Of necessity, the board, staff and mentor spend a considerable amount of time tackling problems caused by the delays in housing construction and housing shortages in the community. They are also engaged in a variety of processes designed to move the housing portfolio forward. The NHA was actively involved in the reserve creation talks and a new round of housing negotiations between the Innu and the federal government, which began shortly after the last of the first 133 homes was completed in 2002. While this work is an important part of the NHA's mandate, it meant that less time was available to build staff confidence and the organization's internal structure and rapport with the community and service providers.

The NHA also faces difficulties being recognized in its own right. Although members of the Mushuau Innu Band Council agree that they need the NHA "to do its job" and that having an arm's-length relationship between the council and the NHA is the best way to achieve that goal, community members do not always make such fine distinctions. Many have trouble abandoning their expectation that everything, including housing-related issues, can only be resolved by the chief and council.

Securing confident, well-trained and reliable NHA staff is essential to achieving recognition and respect for the NHA in the community and beyond. While early staff training efforts were successful and several original staff members remain employed by the NHA, many have left the organization over the last four years. Between 2002 and 2005, for instance, the NHA trained and subsequently lost three housing managers. Some staff members were not able to deal with political, personal and/or other pressures and, after working for some time, resigned. Two band council elections over the same period contributed to a major turnover of people in positions of leadership. While no one argues against the idea that "patterns of White control need to be broken" (Henriksen, 1994, p. 11), key informants in and outside the community are convinced that an entirely Innu-staffed NHA cannot manage the community's present-day housing needs and programmes. Those more involved with the NHA stress that, in this regard, patience is key in building staff skills and self-reliance. In addition, a clearer structure and tighter organization of the main office

functions must be put in place if employees are not to feel overwhelmed by daily tasks.

Many informants suggested that the housing authority needs to continue building its relationships with the community by proceeding with its work on the life-skills programme. Stronger links between the NHA and social-programme delivery organizations, and possibly other communities such as Miawpukek First Nation, Newfoundland, could complement its efforts in internal staff capacity-building and nurturing strong working relations with the Mushuau Innu Band Council.⁶ Although the federal government is eager to withdraw direct logistical and financial support for the NHA, building and maintaining an independent programme-delivery system will take longer than originally estimated. The funding allocated for governance capacity-building in the area of housing was tied to the Mushuau Innu Relocation Agreement (MIRA) funding, which did not indicate that there would be ongoing support for the NHA. It was hard for the Innu to foresee the need to pressure the government to commit to longer-term funding for capacity-building and governance support as the creation of the housing authority was new to the community. There will continue to be a need for an interdisciplinary group of stakeholders to provide various forms of assistance for the NHA's operations: direct, face-to-face office and operational support, even if it is done only periodically; regular support and training in preparing funding and initiative proposals; advice on and facilitation of linkages with other groups, organizations and communities (locally, provincially and nationally); and support in gradually reducing the NHA's dependency on federal government funding and achieving real self-sufficiency. A number of federal government internal memos, documents and confidential interviews with federal civil servants conducted during my work in Natuashish revealed that there was an underlying objective in the government's agenda – to reduce the Mushuau Innu's drain of the federal treasury – and that this had been so since the beginning of relocation negotiations in 1993.

The Reality of Relocation

When turning back to the “big picture”, it is important to remember that the Mushuau Innu relocation was one of the most ambitious and costly relocations of an Aboriginal population in Canadian history. The sheer scale and complexity – and the social, political and environmental conditions that made the move necessary – make it difficult to evaluate the move as an ultimately positive or problematic undertaking. The relocation presented different challenges and benefits to the community's members, to its leaders, to those charged with the construction and the move, and to the Canadian public. While the passing of time will no doubt allow for a clearer perspective on the value of the relocation, analysis of what now seem to be contradictory outcomes can help inform current public policy decisions that will affect the Innu, and likely other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, before the relocation becomes “history”.

By the end of 2004, the federal and provincial governments had spent approximately

6 Representatives of Miawpukek First Nation have been successfully working with the NHA on various capacity-building tasks including housing repairs and inspections as well as on the life-skills programme.

\$280 million to move 700 Innu to Natuashish. According to a CBC Radio News report, this is about \$400,000 for every man, woman and child in the community (CBC Radio News, 2005, February 8). Although it is important to acknowledge the cost of this undertaking when assessing its effectiveness and overall value, it is crucial to fully appreciate the Innu perspective: they demanded that the governments assist them in overcoming years of life in a poor and crowded community by building in a new location and that this new community should provide the Innu with the physical amenities enjoyed by the overwhelming majority of Canada's population. More importantly, the relocation was to provide a fresh start for the community members willing and eager to confront their long-time substance dependency, family violence and other physical and psychological ills (Innu Nation, 1995). In the end, the criteria to determine the value of this relocation are as varied as the organizations, government bodies and individuals participating in this process. At the core of many discussions about the effectiveness of the relocation, however, is the comparison of the monetary investment against the socio-physical benefits the community gained by moving from Davis Inlet to Natuashish.

For their part, most of the 700 Innu living in Natuashish seem to be pleased with their new community and proud of it. Kajetan Rich, a long-time community leader and chair of the Mushuau Innu Relocation Committee, pointed to a reason for this satisfaction when he noted in a conversation that this relocation was different from the one that preceded it in that the Innu were consulted. In the relocation from the old to the new Davis Inlet in 1967, the Innu had little input in the process. From the earlier experience, Rich argued, "we learned that we had to receive community input on the relocation and we made a conscious decision to follow the community's mandate from day one of this initiative" (Rich, 2004).

The relocation project offered many training and employment opportunities for community members. For example, the creation of the Camp and Catering Company, which provided services to the construction crew building the community over a three-year period, was an important initiative that allowed the Mushuau Innu to establish and participate in a joint-business venture that employed many community members. Other employment and training benefits were experienced in the construction trades and the life-skills support and counseling areas. For example, two Innu construction crews were involved in building family homes in Natuashish. At least a dozen Innu men and women gained experience in various service-industry jobs such as cooking and facilities maintenance while working in the construction camp set up to build Natuashish, and seven Innu women and men were trained in various housing-maintenance tasks so that they could help to train the remaining families relocating in the new community. After the completion of the construction phase, most trained local community members did not want to move away to work despite the limited opportunities locally. While some individuals have lost their temporary employment since the effective conclusion of the relocation, the initiative enhanced community members' confidence and range of professional skills. And the direct benefits of the relocation are obvious. Along with moving into comfortable, "modern" homes, the Mushuau Innu were able to address many serious problems that had plagued Davis Inlet. These included overcrowding, lack of land for community expansion, poor access to the mainland and poor water quality (Innu Nation, 1995).

Despite improving the community's physical living conditions, many of the "old

demons” accompanied the Innu to Shango Bay. One of the most serious of these demons has been substance abuse. Innu Chief Simeon Tshakapesh revealed the findings of one study he conducted in Davis Inlet in 2000 that showed that 154 of the 169 youths in the community had abused solvents at some point in their lives (Diversity Watch, www.diversitywatch.ryerson.ca/backgrounds/innu.htm). According to information provided by community members and service providers, the rates of addiction among the adult population have been fluctuating at around 70 per cent since the early 1990s (Innu Nation, 1995, p. 143). Kevin Head, a former coordinator for the Labrador Innu Comprehensive Healing Strategy in Natuashish, who left the community in November 2003, claims that 80 per cent of all community members have a problem with alcohol (CBC Radio, 2003, December 15).

Difficulties with the education of Innu youth also continue. A recent federally commissioned study indicates that one in three Innu children in Labrador never attends school, and students suffer from a high level of developmental, learning and physical challenges (Philpott et al., 2004). Between 1993 and 2004 only three students of the hundreds of school-age children in the community completed high school and there is little likelihood that many more will do so in the immediate future. Without a high school education, young people in the community face a bleak prospect when it comes to finding work either in their own community or elsewhere (CBC Radio, 2004, December 14).

According to the Innu themselves, serious problems also impede the provision of social services. The staff is almost entirely from elsewhere and they do not always work as effectively as they could (Innu Nation, 1995, p. 121). With a chronic shortage of qualified staff and high turnover rates, service organizations have difficulty maintaining meaningful continuity and building relationships of trust and collaboration with the community at large. Natuashish’s remote location is very important in this context. Many professionals are unwilling to relocate with their families to a small community where their spouses do not have many employment opportunities. Some still come, but they often do not manage to cope with the magnitude of the social, health and other problems that their clients experience.

There are other challenges that, while not unique to Natuashish, also make community life difficult. Entrenched family rivalries, nepotism and lack of transparency and accountability influence many, if not most, community activities. The problems stemming from family rivalries and nepotism represent not only the community’s response to long-term economic and social deprivation, but have roots in the Innu traditional social system based on family allegiances and solidarity – a system that is challenged by the imposed system that has a single chief and council overseeing a community composed of several family groupings. Many of those in the community who “make it” in the political and/or economic sense are torn between their loyalty to their own family members and their duty to serve the entire Innu community. In many cases those elected to council are pressured to make decisions that favour their own kin. A lack of transparency was often cited by community members in cases of various employment appointments and allocations of travel and other limited community funds. To make matters worse, the media spotlight has affected many aspects of the community’s relations with the outside world and has even led to exploitation by profit-seeking opportunists (i.e., consultants seeking contracts). While the mandate from the community has long been for leaders to “work

together and support each other”, to be more proactive and not to sink into a perpetual state of disengagement (Innu Nation, 1995, p. 125), it has often proven difficult to live up to these ideals.

Lessons Learned

Some of the challenges faced by those involved in the relocation project were related to time – both in terms of delays and in terms of haste. Most of the key informants commented that the time to plan the relocation and the new community was not sufficient. The federal government was embarrassed by the media coverage of the deplorable living conditions and the social problems in Davis Inlet. This sense of embarrassment, the public pressure and the desire for the problem to go away shaped many key relocation decisions. The government’s mandate was to complete the whole relocation project in three to four years, but its efforts were thwarted as delays occurred at the beginning and during the progress of the initiative.

Among the reasons for the delays was a lack of transparency and efficiency in the planning and delivery of the project. The process involved many different stakeholders, including a number of levels of provincial and federal government bureaucrats, many of whom were expected to defend and adhere to specific agendas and mandates. For example, the federal civil servants directly involved in managing the relocation were asked about, and encouraged to focus on, the physical and financial aspects of the move rather than participating in the “big picture” discussions – in large part due to the federal government’s strategy to mitigate potential liabilities by concentrating only on contractually binding issues. While a small number of Innu leaders were consulted regularly, some crucial planning and relocation decisions were made by the senior steering committee comprised of high-ranking bureaucrats. Ultimately, there was not enough productive communication between the various levels of government.

Another problem was that between 1996 and 1999 the Mushuau Innu had been responsible for receiving and managing a significant amount of federal government transfer monies while having no clear financial management-control framework or a clear agreement on deliverables. The responsibility and the information flow were overwhelming. Moreover, there were also rumours concerning financial discrepancies and mismanagement of the funds by the band council and, as these rumours became more widely known, the situation was “remedied” by shifting the control of the project into the hands of the federal government.⁷ One extreme was replaced with another with the result that the collaborative relocation planning and implementation framework was severely undermined. Moreover, complicated relations among the initiative’s stakeholders often impaired collaborative decision-making. Several key relocation stakeholders noted that many of those charged with the relocation did not really “step up to the plate”. This made for a rough start and delayed significantly the initiative’s implementation. The delays, according to a few interview respondents

7 As is often the case when it comes to governments and large amounts of money, parts of federal funding earmarked for the construction of the new community and the development of specific training programmes appear not to have been spent as intended. If there is truth to rumours among Innu in the community and among contracted employees, community leaders/leadership were sometimes taking extended trips and purchasing various personal items.

representing the community and the government, hindered the introduction of important, innovative project-management strategies and the pursuit of pro-active rather than reactive steps. The tone and the actual decisions made during many meetings about the relocation were also influenced by what the media had to report on the initiative or the community at the given time as well as how senior federal civil servants decided to react to this information and the resultant public reaction.

One of the lessons learned in this regard was that the federal government placed too much responsibility related to the management of finances, public policies and strategic planning in the hands of Innu. No preliminary analysis was done of the community's capacity to manage such an ambitious undertaking and, as a result, the process was initiated without the necessary support and skills development and without an appropriate community-consultation mechanism. The federal government also did not devote sufficient staff to the project. Only three employees from the regional Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) office in Amherst, Nova Scotia, were responsible for the day-to-day work.

Another problem identified by government and community representatives and by professionals involved in the relocation was a lack of comprehensiveness in the overall approach and execution of the relocation. For example, as one of the civil servants noted, in community consultations related to the relocation planning more serious consideration should have been given in the early stages to all possible alternatives to the relocation to Natuashish, such as moving closer to the town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay or attempting to modernize the Davis Inlet location for a fraction of the current cost (see Wilkinson, 1995, for alternative relocation options). These alternatives may not have been chosen, but the advantages and drawbacks of the remote location of Natuashish would have been discussed and considered more thoroughly by more community members.

While there have been a number of Aboriginal community relocations nationally and in Labrador itself, the Davis Inlet-to-Natuashish relocation was perceived and addressed by the majority of the participants as a unique experience. It was unsettling to those on the front lines of programme delivery to hear, over the course of several years of close involvement with a broad range of relocation stakeholders, only a few passing references to other, similar experiences and lessons learned from these experiences. Not only the Mushuau Innu, but also many of the participants in this massive project felt at times overwhelmed and frequently adopted reactive steps when confronting project-related challenges. One of more dramatic examples of such reactive behaviour was observed in early 2003 when the remaining Innu followed the first wave of community members to Natuashish and ended up living in tents or in extremely crowded conditions in the finished homes. In response, the Innu leaders and the government stakeholders were forced, during the summer of 2003, to finish existing basement spaces in already constructed homes. This project took significant energy and funds that could have been devoted to the construction of new homes if the political decision had been to postpone the move to a date later than December 2002. Fortunately, according to accounts by many Innu community members, chief and council members as well as other stakeholders involved in the relocation, the decision to establish the housing authority in the community – more of an afterthought than an integral part of the vision – has proven to be a good decision.

Conclusion

The Mushuau Innu relocation to Natuashish provided “an incredible opportunity”, but it also posed an “enormous challenge”, according to legal scholars Constance Backhouse and Donald McRae in their *Report to the Canadian Human Rights Commission on the Treatment of the Innu of Labrador by the Government of Canada*. “It could be an opportunity for the transformation of the community, or it could result in the social dysfunction of Davis Inlet simply being moved to Natuashish” (2002, p. 11). As many Innu themselves recognize, the outcomes, at least in part, depended on, and will continue to be determined by, the choices and actions of the community.

Designing and implementing a sound Mushuau Innu resettlement strategy proved difficult for everyone involved. In the context of relocations imposed on Aboriginal communities by the government, however, the Davis Inlet-to-Natuashish move represents a radical departure from previous undertakings. Most notably, the community made a conscious decision to improve its life by relocating as well as to relocate to a place of their own choosing. Early steps by the Mushuau Innu were made without coercion and were supported by a community and stakeholder consultation process.

The relocation itself generated a significant number of jobs for the Innu. Many were trained in construction trades; others were trained in administration. As the relocation activities were completed, though, economic and employment opportunities in Natuashish became similar to those that had existed in Davis Inlet. Exposure to and participation in this large-scale undertaking, however, allowed community members to gain knowledge of the ways that they could engage in economic development and entrepreneurial activities, and the benefits of this experience are recognized by the Innu and by those involved in various training and capacity-building activities during and after the relocation. In Natuashish, many jobs could be available to the Innu in the service sector if the necessary education levels are achieved. The Innu could, for instance, work in medical and social services positions and as teachers, electrical technicians and managers. However, these positions require university- and college-level professional training, which still remains unattainable for the majority of the community members.

Innu leaders and community members agree that at this stage of the community’s life there is also a great need to concentrate on current social issues in order to protect the community. In a 1994 paper reflecting on 27 years of research among the Mushuau Innu, Georg Henriksen argued that “for the Innu to be able to release their innovative potential and create a richer economic basis for their community, they must go through a process of healing both as individuals and as a community” (1994, p. 3). One way to address those current social issues and to promote community healing would be to complement existing school facilities and family accommodations with a viable communal infrastructure where there are opportunities for public gatherings and pastimes for all ages. The existing preoccupation with improving the physical living conditions for individual Mushuau Innu families is understandable, but there remains a need for greater investment in continuing social programmes in the community. On a practical level, the community’s geographical location presents logistical and financial challenges such as more difficult access to various types of expertise required to undertake major community projects, the high costs of food and all other supplies, and the limited options for transportation in and

out of the community. This isolation will continue to play a role in efforts to build community capacity and provide quality services, and these efforts should take into account the added costs of doing work in this remote Innu town as well as the fact that what is possible to do in other communities closer to major urban centres may take many times longer in Natuashish.

Considering all the factors that worked against the Natuashish Housing Authority's survival and the building of its capacity, the initiative had a successful start. The move to the new location is effectively complete, but much work lies ahead. The success of community support and development initiatives – many of which relate to housing and the NHA's work – will depend largely on a well-planned, executed and sustained post-relocation strategy. To draw on experience gained, efforts should be made to engage the main stakeholders involved in various phases of the relocation process. Moreover, the Innu themselves argue that the federal government should not abandon the community when the last of the homes built under the relocation agreement is completed, and that sustained support to the community is needed, both in order to protect this significant financial investment and, more importantly, in order to promote the well-being of the Mushuau Innu. Many Innu and members of the capacity-building team fear that political pressure to curb spending will prompt the federal government to pull out of the community without an exit strategy.

When looking five to ten years “down the road”, residents of Natuashish know that they must develop – with all community members' input – their own by-laws and constitution that properly reflect their community's priorities and needs. They need to invest in Innu education and health services and to become more independent in running their own programmes such as the Natuashish Housing Authority. They also need to raise a generation of local community members capable of carrying out the various jobs that are currently filled by outsiders. These goals have to be achieved if the Mushuau Innu are to move gradually toward self-sufficiency and a self-governing life in this new community.

A few community members, including Mary Jane Piwas, are not optimistic about the future: “There is still a small shred of hope for Natuashish, but the way things are going, with all our problems and blame being shifted to other people, to white people, the RCMP and the government, then it all becomes hopeless” (Hutchinson, 2003, November 4). But others are more optimistic. Kiti Rich, a former Innu chief, maintains “we will not be able to go back to our traditions 100 per cent. We will be using some Innu ways and some non-Innu ways of living. There will be two paths for us. For example, there will be people in the country and others who will have careers. We want our kids to grow up to be nurses, teachers or doctors, but to understand the culture at the same time” (Innu Nation, 1995, p. 181). For his part, George Rich wants to see his children prepared to face challenges in their lives and feel less “caught between worlds” (2000, p. 38). Shaping a stable cultural identity remains a project in progress in the newly completed Natuashish.

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