

**RESEARCH DEPARTMENT**

**AN OVERVIEW OF CONCERNS ON  
THE PRESENT STATE OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

**Presented by Makivik Research Department**

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## INTRODUCTION

The Inuit of Northern Québec have a strong and continuing interest in the development of their communities and territory. Although the meaning of development is not always clear, Inuit understand very well that they have an important role to play in development-related decisions and activities. Inuit are also coming to understand that they are not really allowed to participate effectively. The difficulty they face is how to change this situation.

This meeting provides an important opportunity for all parties to identify the most critical problems that must be resolved to assure an orderly construction program with beneficial impacts on communities from airstrip construction.

# **INUIT AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

## **GENERAL CONCERNS**

Social impact assessment was viewed by Inuit as the type of research that, at last, could play a positive role in the life of the community, since it provided a voice for the people and an opportunity to advance legitimate community interest. These expectations have not materialized. What communities provided was not some impossible "wish list", but rather a set of legitimate instructions to responsible authorities about how to maximize potential benefits and minimize potential negative impacts. In retrospect, this exercise was at best misleading, but most probably it served to deceive. The deception is compounded by the fact that the communities desperately want an improved air service so they are prepared to ignore or substantially compromise with their stated concerns in order not to jeopardize construction.

Inuit representative organizations within the northern municipalities have made an honest and thoughtful attempt to deal with the problems of a massively disruptive construction project. They also attempted to transfer in many significant ways important community benefits. They were led to believe by the social and economic researchers responsible for the study that the environmental review process was a protection for their community and they acted accordingly and in good faith.

The impact assessment process called for a review and evaluation for social and economic factors, and the communities took their mandate to

identify problems and their solutions very seriously. Time is now at hand for stating what has actually taken place in relationship to what the communities justifiably requested within a process that is designed to protect their legitimate interests and concerns. What emerges from this examination is a very serious short coming between the stated objectives of the social and economic impact studies, the specific findings of these studies and the real application of findings after the review process. At the present time, much of what the community stated in terms of economic and social benefits or concerns has been totally ignored when planning and carrying out construction.

The process of assessment and evaluation has to date been successful in so far as the airstrips have been permitted to be built. It is not successful in so far as the community expectations of complimentary benefits are concerned. It was stated in Kangirsuk that airstrips need not be thought of as "Christmas presents". They are essential and they need not be considered as a gift. Consequently, they should provide other opportunities for much needed community development. People trained in heavy equipment had expectations, other community workers had expectations, and the communities themselves have a structure for meeting these and other economic and social expectations. The question that must now be answered is how to address this problem.

## **THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

Fieldwork on social impact assessment for the northern airstrips has now been carried out in six communities and there is a coalescing of Inuit opinion about their roles and their rights in this process. Ideas first stated at Salluit and Ivujivik were heard again in Povungnituk and Kangirsuk, and the experiences of Ivujivik are being heard in the other communities. In particular, questions are raised about how the Inuit can gain an effective sharing of control over a process that in itself has such a strong potential for negative impact.

The methods used for impact assessment studies in Northern Québec must identify problems and address issues that are relevant to the current conditions and long-term needs of Inuit.

Communities are concerned with the process of consultation that must take place if a project as complex as the Northern Airport Infrastructure Improvement Program is going to be successful. For the Inuit, the process of consultation is a critical starting point for translating the negotiated aims and objectives of a policy into the specific requirements and concerns of an Inuit community.

Planning for a significant change in the infrastructure must be incorporated into the social, economic and physical structure of each community in a way that is unique to each particular situation. The impact studies for the Airstrip Improvement Program provided communities with an opportunity to voice concerns, offer opinions and ideas, and provide valuable information.

Social impact assessment in the north can only be effective if it incorporates the perspectives, values and participation of Inuit in each of the four phases that comprise the assessment process. These phases are:

1. establishing the terms of reference for impact assessment studies;
  2. participating in the planning and execution of these studies;
  3. maintaining membership in the Environmental Quality Commission;
- and
4. exercising a control over decisions that occur during the final (post-assessment) stage of project planning and throughout actual construction.

Access to information and decision-making, through the Environmental Quality Commission, is at the present time a cornerstone of Inuit involvement in the impact assessment. Because Inuit hold three positions on the K.E.Q.C. they have the opportunity to contribute specific knowledge, perspective and values to the deliberations and decisions on the merits and conditions of development projects. In the future, they will also have the opportunity to participate in the design and execution of research and data analysis for impact assessment studies of airstrips, through the Makivik Research Department and through the archeological program between Transport Québec and Avataq Cultural Institute.

The most important short-term problem that must be resolved, is how Inuit can participate more effectively in Phases 1 and 4 of the assessment process. Participation in Phase 1 requires that a well-defined procedure be established to assure that Inuit have a real voice in determining the contents and orientation of the terms of reference that must be submitted by project

proponents. The need for establishing this role is demonstrated by the fact that Inuit do not feel they are presently able to make any significant contribution towards setting the principles, questions and priorities for impact assessment studies. To this end, the Inuit are adamant in their opinion about what elements in the life of their communities are most important with respect to potential impact from projects. They also cautioned researchers not to try to establish the only value system around which the positive and negative impacts from airstrips or other projects should be evaluated.

Inuit question who controls the assessment procedure; what type of protection impact assessment actually provides for the bio-physical and socio-economic environment of their community and region; why these protections are needed; and how specific impacts are determined and corrective or remedial measures established. In order to answer these questions, appropriate terms of reference must be developed so that they identify problems and address issues that are relevant to the current conditions and long term needs of Inuit.

Such an approach does not mean that southern-based concerns are disregarded, or that well-established principles of research and analysis are ignored. It simply means that the context for identifying and solving problems must be enlarged and the time frame, methods and statement of results made accountable to Inuit. What these questions imply is that the proponent of a development project must be able to interact with Inuit values and points of view in a manner that enables a cross-cultural



understanding of problems and their solutions to be addressed in the terms of reference, in the research and in the recommendations.

Closely tied to the question of social impact assessment is the question of planning and of establishing a better framework for coordinating all of the different decisions that are made on behalf of the community by organizations that are usually not knowledgeable of one another.

The Inuit considered that impacts resulting from the airstrip or other community infrastructure developments are often related to ineffective planning. They questioned why it seemed to take impact assessment for a project to create a concern about planning. The problem as stated by Inuit is that no one is really in control of community planning and thus, every mandate is treated in isolation. They called upon the different organizations that were proposing projects to coordinate their plans and specific requirements prior to coming to the community. It was felt that the municipal councils or other bodies could never make rational decisions since they never knew the full range of issues.

The Inuit felt that certain groups were very naive about the requirements of northern projects and the type of planning that was necessary to make them successful. They also said they felt that some of the people sent to do studies are unaware of how to work in the north, and do not ask the proper questions or seem to understand the issues. These people are said to bother the community and it is felt they can not write strong reports if they are unprepared and do not have the time to understand.



The Inuit stated that, although it may be the mandate of project proponents to identify planning requirements and impact assessment, it is the communities that are penalized when improper studies and poor consultation lead to the failure of a project to meet the criteria necessary for the review process. If a project needed by the community is rejected because of inappropriate terms of reference, inadequate study design or because of incomplete consultation, it is the community that is the big loser.

## **CORRECTING THE IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS**

The problem that now confronts the K.E.Q.C. is how to superimpose a workable structure onto a situation that has already been established and which can not be quickly changed. What must be done is to identify the essential problems and then ask if and how these problems can be solved for Inukjuak and Tasiujaq.

In order to begin this procedure, the Makivik Research Department has reviewed its six community studies, all of which were based on intensive community consultation. From this review, five assumptions can be made:

- 1) That the consultations in the first four communities resulted in the identification of the major issues and concerns that are or will be, voiced by all of the other communities.
- 2) That the important next step must be to consolidate community opinion and ideas into a general set of working principles and procedures that can be used to animate discussions in all other communities.
- 3) That this emphasis on consolidation of a working set of principles and procedures will then provide a much more consistent and honest way to work out the unique problems for each specific community.

4) That the assessment process has been restricted by the terms of reference and general orientation of the studies and its has consequently not been able to fully respond to the issues as identified by communities.

5) That the assessment process can not by itself be expected to compensate for all of the problems that have been developing within the larger system.

The general structure of the research and assessment process, along with the identification of the primary problems that must be resolved are illustrated on the accompanying diagram.

