An Inuit perspective on the sustainable development of Nunavik

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1. Introduction

The need, demand and production of energy are all subjects of on-going debates at the local, regional, national and international level. Water and energy were amongst the five areas identified by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, to be discussed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development held last August in Johannesburg. The Inuit Circumpolar Conference meeting, also held last August in Kuujjuaq, Nunavik, discussed the use of energy and sustainable development in the Arctic. At the regional level, our efforts are also aimed at developing our resources in a sustainable manner.

Sustainable development and self-determination are linked concepts:development comes when the proper structures and institutions are in place. In 1978, following the signature of the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* [JBNQA], Makivik was created to represent the Inuit of Nunavik with respect to all matters relating to their social, cultural, economic, and political rights, including treaty amendments and negotiations, environmental impact assessments, negotiation of impact and benefit agreements, social and environmental research, renewable resource development and various local and regional economic development activities.

The JBNQA defines the context for discussions with governments and development promoters. With this tool, the Nunavik Inuit can play a major role in the economic and social development, the protection of the environment and the management of renewable and non-renewable resources of their territory. Of course, this is done in coordination and in conjunction with other regional organizations such as the Kativik Regional Government (KRG), the Kativik Regional Development Council and the Nunavik Tourism Association.

The JBNQA is a treaty protected under Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution, which confirms the rights of Nunavik Inuit to land and resources north of the 55th parallel in Quebec. Water being one of the main resources, the Inuit consider that their

constitutional consent is a prerequisite to any significant governmental decisions regarding Nunavik water resources.

With the report from the Commission on Self-Government in Nunavik having been tabled in March 2001, we are confident that self –government is now not only possible but feasible in the short term. It is within this context, in order to set guidelines for the development of our natural resources, that the *Partnership Agreement on Economic and Community Development in Nunavik* (Partnership Agreement) was signed last April by the Government of Québec, the Kativik Regional Government and Makivik.

Over the past decades, the exploration and exploitation of the renewable and non-renewable resources of Nunavik have raised fundamental questions. For example, the pros and cons of the Great Whale River Hydroelectric Complex were discussed and debated between 1978 and 1982 and then from 1989 to 1995. In its own way, this Forum is now asking us to answer the same question, which is : how should such a major resource as water be used?

Before answering, it would be appropriate to describe the territory and its population.

2. Nunavik

Covering the territory north of the 55th parallel in Quebec, Nunavik has a surface area of 500,164.15 km2 (see map No 1). It is bordered by Labrador, Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait and Ungava Bay. Its coastline stretches for some 2,500 km.

Population

We, Inuit, have been inhabiting the area for centuries. As nomadic hunters, we have occupied the whole territory, from North to South and East to West. We have also us the offshore areas of Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait and Ungava Bay, going as far as the Labrador Coast to fish and hunt seal, walrus and polar bear. In the 1950s, the process of


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Kangiqsujuaq
Quaqtaq
Kangirsuk
Aupaluk
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Kuujjuaq
Inukjuak
Puvirnituq
Akulivik
Salluit
Ivujivik
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settling in villages led to major changes within our society. The subsistence economy centered on hunting, fishing and trapping gave way to a mixed economy, in which wage earning began playing an increasingly important role.

There are now 14 communities in Nunavik with a population of over 9,000 Inuit and approximately 700 non-Native. At 2,6% per year, the net population growth rate is among the highest in the country and is expected to remain high for at least the next decade. The Inuit population is also very young, 41,3% being under 15 years of age. Inuit households have an average of 4,6 people.

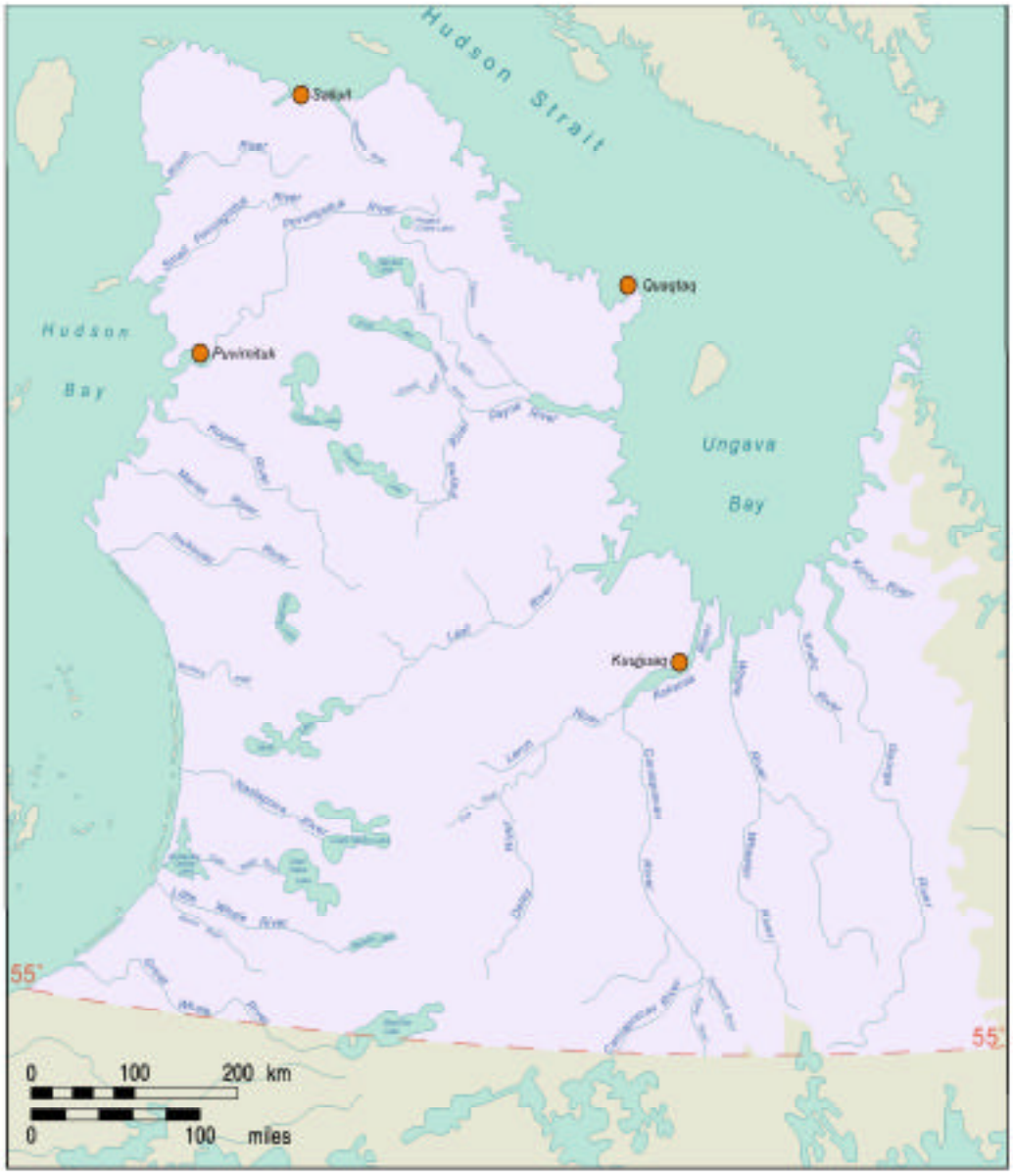
Kuujjuaq (1,845 residents) and Kuujjuarapik (625 residents) are distinct from the other villages in that they are gateways to Nunavik; they are home to numerous services and government organizations and have large community infrastructures. The other important villages are Inukjuak (1,270 residents), Puvirnituq (1,270 residents) and Salluit (1,015 residents). The remaining nine villages are smaller, with populations ranging from 195 to 705.

Transportation

There are no roads in Nunavik outside the villages. The communities are linked to southern Quebec by air year round and by sea during the summer. Communities are linked to one another by air transport — provided by Air Inuit, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Makivik — as well as by snowmobile in winter and by boat in summer.

Hydrography

The main watersheds of Nunavik are those of the Koksoak, George, Leaf, Whale, Arnaud (Payne) and Le Pellé rivers, which flow into Ungava Bay, and those of the Great Whale, Little Whale, Nastapoka, and Povungnituk rivers, which flow into Hudson Bay. Map No 2 indicates their location and the extent of the territory they cover. These rivers play an


Hudson Strait
Hudson Bay
Ungava Bay
55°
55°
0 100 200 km
0 100 miles

important role in the natural cycle of the ecological zones that transect them. The valleys of the large waterways in these zones contain a relatively dense concentration of unique ecosystems and habitats that are essential to the survival of wildlife. These watersheds also have potential for hydroelectric development.

As mentioned above, Nunavik is bordered by Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait and Ungava Bay. It is home to a multitude of wildlife species essential to the pursuit of subsistence activities.

Climate

The region's distinctiveness is also reflected in its climate. Two types have been identified: an Arctic climate in the northern part, and a sub-Arctic climate in the southern section. From north to south, the annual average temperature rises from -7.5°C to -2.5°C. Large bodies of water (Hudson and Ungava bays) influence the local climates. Continuous in the north, and discontinuous in the south, permafrost is another characteristic of Nunavik cold climates.

In the northern part of Nunavik, the average total annual precipitation is 300 mm, whereas it is 700 mm in the southern part. Compared with southern Quebec, which receives more than 1,000 mm of rain and snow each year, Nunavik can be characterized as having a rather dry climate.

Ice covers the sea from November to July and greatly influences the transportation of goods by sea.

Vegetation

In the sub-Arctic zone of southern Nunavik, the vegetation is characteristically taiga, while the Arctic zone in northern Nunavik is made up of elements representative of

tundra. Between the two lies a semi-Arctic transition zone composed of a blend of vegetation from taiga and tundra.

Wildlife

The wildlife of Nunavik can be grouped into four major categories: land mammals, marine mammals, birds, and fresh and saltwater fish. Although wildlife is present throughout the region, some environments offer a greater diversity of habitats, thereby favoring a concentration of different species. Such is the case in coastal areas and on banks of lakes and rivers. For example, the Hudson Bay coast lies along the geese migratory route and is an area where aquatic species congregate. Caribou are notable because of the size of the herds inland.

There are four salmon rivers: the George, Whale, Leaf and Koksoak (which includes the Mélèzes (Larch), Du Gué and Delay) rivers. Arctic char, which live in some hundred rivers of Nunavik, is a highly-prized species for both subsistence and sport fishing.

The coastal area includes at least two zones where beluga gather in the summer: the estuaries of the Mucalic and the Nastapoka rivers, which are protected as sanctuaries and are seasonally-closed by regulation. The coastal area is also home to other marine mammals such as walrus, harbor seal, bearded seal, ringed seal and harp seal.

3. The Partnership Agreement and Resource Development

The purpose of the Partnership Agreement, is to " establish a new nation-to-nation relationship and to put forward a common vision of the economic and community development of Nunavik."

To achieve this goal, Québec has agreed to: 1) fund a Nunavik electric transmission line study; 2) evaluate the hydroelectric potential north of the 55th parallel; 3) encourage and facilitate the signing of agreements between Makivik and the mining companies

concerning remedial measures and monitoring, financial agreements, employment and contracts; 4) provide KRG with an amount of $8 million over 5 years to carry out studies for the development of parks; 5) create the Pingualuit provincial park; 6) provide funding for the communities and economic development in the order of $7 million for the first year, $8 million in the second year and $15 million in the third year and each subsequent year of the Agreement, and 7) to make more efficient the public funds paid to KRG by consolidating in a single envelope (Block Funding) subsidies from various governmental departments. As well, local roads will be paved, the marine infrastructures program will continue, police services will be improved, a detention facility will be build, and wildlife management and enforcement will be improved by hiring six additional Wildlife Conservation Officers.

It is the intention of the Partnership Agreement to "accelerate the development of the hydroelectric, mining and tourism potential of Nunavik, favor economic spin-offs for Nunavik Inuit and favor a greater autonomy for Makivik and KRG and give them more responsibilities on the economic and community development of Nunavik Inuit".

Our responsibility is to see to the sustainable development of Nunavik. Energy demand is growing and we have undertaken to work in conjunction with Quebec in order to accelerate the development of our natural resources. This is clearly stated in the Partnership Agreement. We are not however selling our resources at basement bargain prices on a first come first serve basis. This has never been our intention and it is still not our intention to day. We have not changed our position. We always have maintained that development has to be done according to certain rules: it has to benefit the Inuit, and take into consideration our views, preoccupations and concerns.

With the Partnership Agreement, the Government recognizes our position. It is the basis for a renewed dialogue based on respect, partnership and understanding of each other needs. The Partnership Agreement is a new basis to undertake discussions with the goal of developing projects that will benefit both the Inuit and the Quebec society at large. It is a milestone to render the development of Nunavik sustainable.

4. Sustainable Development

Sustainable development of Nunavik is our goal. The 1987 United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development — the Brundtland Commission — defined sustainable development as development which ensures that the use of resources and the environment today does not damage prospects for their use by future generations. This definition was adopted in the Act to Amend the Auditor General Act in 1995. In 1998, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs used it as a starting point to formulate its sustainable development strategy.

In Nunavik, we are also aiming for development that is sustainable in all its economic, environmental and social aspects. Protection of the environment, economic development and human development have to be considered as an entity. They are interrelated aspects and what affects one affects the others.

5. Water Resources

There are many uses and potential uses of the water resources in Nunavik. For centuries we have used Nunavik's numerous waterways and lakes not only for fishing but also as routes to access hunting grounds. Today, we still hunt and fish for subsistence and use rivers and lakes for commercial fishing, outfitting and tourism.

Subsistence activities play a fundamental role in the use of resources. As much as 70% of the meat intake comes from harvesting activities. Rivers and lakes are productive; for instance, the Arctic char population of Deception River in the northernmost part of the region was estimated to be over 100,000. The Koksoak, Whale and George rivers also have a large Arctic char population. The salmon of the Koksoak River is harvested for subsistence, sport and commercial purposes.

For at least 40 years, Hydro-Québec has taken an interest in many of these rivers. Studies have been carried out to assess the hydroelectric potential of the region and at this very moment prefeasability studies are underway on the George, Koksoak, Caniapiscau and Nastapoka rivers. Up to now, only the James Bay Hydroelectric project has been completed and, even though located south of the 55th parallel, it affects Nunavik economically and socially. It had a direct impact on the Caniapiscau River, diverted to create the Caniapiscau reservoir which is a major part of the La Grande Project (1975).

Water resources may also be used for exportation. While no specific projects involving Nunavik rivers exist at the present time, exportation is a potential use that cannot be ignored. We are aware of the interest shown in the possibilities of using ocean tankers to ship water from Canada to foreign markets. In the early 1980s, a proposal was put forward to ship water from Sept-Iles to markets in the Middle East and recently similar types of projects have been publicly discussed. There is also the on-going debate as to the economic benefits and environmental impacts of the exportation of bottled water. For now, the debate centers on sub-surface water but eventually the pristine rivers of Nunavik may become attractive for the bottled-water market.

Over the years many projects have been proposed regarding the mass exportation of water. Among the many proposed water diversion schemes the GRAND Canal, the North America Water & Power Alliance, the Kuiper Plan and the Central North American Water Project are all projects that would affect in one way or another the coastal waters of James Bay and Hudson Bay.

As one can see, there are many uses and potential uses of the water resource, some conflicting, others reconcilable. In fact, the fundamental question should not be what to do with a particular river or lake, but who is in the best position to manage and ensure the protection and sustainable development of the environment, wildlife and the Inuit Culture of Nunavik.

6. Master Plan for Land Use in Nunavik

To achieve this goal, the Kativik Regional Government has drawn up a *Master Plan for Land Use in the Kativik Region* (Master Plan). It is the first step in a concerted management process of lands and resources, and constitutes the basis for the management of all activities in the territory.

The Master Plan came into force following approval by the Minister of Municipal Affairs on October 29, 1998. The master plan is mandatory over all the territory that is not entrenched within a municipal structure nor included in a municipality. Never before was a land management master plan implemented in Nunavik.

The Master Plan will be implemented by adopting regulations and taking other non-regulatory actions flowing directly from its major orientations and objectives. The Master Plan does not bind the Government of Quebec, its departments and agencies, nor would any resulting regulation. Nevertheless, it was approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and it is hoped that the government of Quebec will recognize at least a moral obligation with respect to its implementation.

The Master Plan was established through consultations with the local communities, regional organizations, various user groups, as well as government and other public organizations. It advocates a global approach adapted to the unique scope of Nunavik, to the diversity of its environment and to the sometimes divergent interests of residents and various other users.

The Koksoak and its tributary the Caniapiscau River, which was diverted by Hydro-Québec to create the reservoir of the same name, and the Deception River, which was dammed by Falconbridge for the Raglan mine project, are still being used for subsistence

activities, outfitting and adventure tourism. This multiple-use concept is one that the Inuit are ready to study further.

Nunavik's vast river system is valued for its past and present use for Inuit subsistence activities as well as for its recreational and tourism potential. Given their ecological and cultural values as well as their potential for hydroelectric development, the use and management of the rivers should certainly be carefully planned so as to prevent conflicts among user groups.

7. Conclusion

The intent of the Partnership Agreement is to accelerate development in Nunavik. It has to be, however, a development that protects the environment and benefits the Inuit people. Resources are plentiful in the region with various users each with its own needs and demands. The uses of the land for hunting, tourism, outfitting, parks, mining and hydroelectricity all have to be reconciled. To achieve this goal, the concept of multiple-use of the rivers has to be further explored and the Master Plan is a useful tool for a concerted management of the resource.

Sustainable development has had many definitions. We are of the view that there are three interrelated aspects to sustainable development : environment, economy and the people. The first two are much talked about while the third one, the social aspects or the people of Nunavik seems quite often relegated to a secondary role.

To face development, to be able to exercice some control and to manage it to our advantage, structures and institutions are required. Many such structures are already in place and self-government will give us greater control over the management of the resources.

Finally, our most precious resource is people. This resource has to be developed in conjunction with other resources. It is the only way to render development sustainable. A

lot of effort is being spent to educate and traine our youth. It is the resource that will sustain our future as a society.
