

# Land, environment & life: Cree social economy

## Project #32

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# Introduction

- ❑ What does the term “social economy” mean to an Aboriginal community in Ontario?
  - The research team selected the northern Ontario First Nation community of Fort Albany to:
    - Critically assess the relevance of social economy concepts and frameworks to Cree people of Fort Albany First Nation.
    - Identify areas of local economic practice that are culturally meaningful.
    - Support local Cree participants to document local economic practice and key issues related to social, economic and environmental change.

# Background and Rationale

- ❑ The social economy frame carries cultural assumptions from the Western paradigm that do not translate easily to Cree cultural contexts.
  - Omushkegowuk (Cree) strive to maintain traditional and mixed forms of economic and social practice building on relationships of people to their land base.
  - Resulting traditional practices and kinship obligations have implications for the understanding of “third sector” services.
  - What perspectives do youth, adults, and elders express concerning the role of land for social and economic well-being?

# Project Methodology

- ❑ Community Based and Led
  - A community advisory group from Fort Albany oversees all research activities and makes suggestions for what is needed.
  - Research undertaken for the project will also inform the land use committee.
  - Youth from the community will interview elders, adults and peers from the community, using the material as the basis for a radio documentary.

# Role and Participation of Community Partners

- Chris Metatawabin, Economic Development Officer, Fort Albany First Nation
  - Facilitates local community involvement.
  - Coordinator and member of a community consultation group for the research project.
  - Ensures inclusion of diverse perspectives within the community.
  - Ensures inclusion of youth and elder voices, and a balance between male and female.

# Role and Participation of Community Partners

- ❑ Community advisory group in Fort Albany
  - Ensures inclusion of diverse perspectives within the community.
  - Ensures inclusion of voices young and old, male and female.
  - Directs the research project to ensure the research provides value to the community.
  - Provides questions that will assist the community with working toward its own goals of economic and social development.

# River Trip & Radio Documentary

- Intro to research workshop
  - A two-day “intro to research” workshop prepares youth to interview and record elder stories about land and life.
  - The workshop reviews the basics of community-based research and provides some interviewing skills enhancement.
- River Trip
  - The youth prepare for a river excursion involving community leaders and elders where they can document stories about traditional territory on their own terms.
  - 10-14 day river trip during the summer 2008 with the elders provides the setting for conversations that become the data for the documentary and our project.
- Radio Documentary
  - The youth-produced radio documentary provides skills-building opportunities for youth and disseminates information to the community about our findings on land and life in Fort Albany.

# Implications for the Social Economy

- Cree perspectives on social responsibilities may differ from key concepts in Canadian social economy literature
  - Land as provider serves purpose of third sector providing basic needs, food, sustenance, shelter, mindful of community responsibilities
  - The land's role in Cree social relations is reflected in changes to language:
    - The region elders call Pacquataskimik refers to all of traditional territory, a place that provides all one needs.
    - The youth refer to Noscheemik, meaning 'bush' or camp, a more specific location and different conceptualization of land, while Pacquataskimik is no longer used, reflecting changes after settlement onto the reserve, changes in cultural and economic practice.
    - Concepts relevant to seeking deeper understanding about how the Cree view the meaning of social and economy.



# How Students Benefited from the Project

- ❑ **Doctoral student involvement**
  - Sheila Gruner, an OISE/UT Ph.D. student, is building relationships in the community where her thesis research is located.
- ❑ **Local community student involvement**
  - Fort Albany youth will attend a workshop where they will learn research skills, and plan a river trip.
  - The river trip will bring youth and Elders together to learn about the land, language and culture.
  - The youth will videotape and audiotape conversations with Elders creating a community resource, an archival record broadcast on the Internet and radio.

# Next Steps

- Workshop with youth in April
- River trip is scheduled for June
- Youth continue to interview through the summer 2008
- Documentary produced in the fall of 2008
- Findings will support Fort Albany land use planning process, the research advisory group and the Social Economy Centre.