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BRIEF

For the Study on Food Security in Northern
Communities Conducted by the Standing
Committee on Indigenous and Northern
Affairs

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NUNAVIK REGIONAL BOARD OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Existing Initiatives in the Region and the Challenges Encountered

The Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services (NRBHSS) provides support for organizations in carrying out initiatives that contribute to food security, health and well-being. This can take the form of professional support, funding, training, opportunities for networking and resources such as toolkits, recipes and so forth.

Some existing initiatives:

- ✓ Cooking activities and community kitchens using both traditional food and store-bought food, primarily run by local family houses, the schools jointly with the organization Fusion Jeunesse and the health centres;
- ✓ Activities to help people make healthier food choices (e.g., in-store activities, nutrition-related activities in family houses).

Regional resources and projects in the area of food aid:

- ✓ Distribution of food coupons among pregnant women and education on adopting healthy lifestyles;
- ✓ Breakfast and snack programs in schools;
- ✓ Emergency food aid for persons in quarantine due to COVID-19;
- ✓ Initiatives for food baskets or meal distribution;
- ✓ Hunter Support Program and community freezer (all communities), managed by the Kativik Regional Government (KRG).

Several challenges and limits persist in the implantation of some of these initiatives and can reduce their impact and scope.

The lack of infrastructure limits the type of program offered. For example, in many communities, there is insufficient space for organizing workshops on cooking or transforming traditional foods or for storing large quantities of food meant for food aid. Sometimes, such spaces are available but require major renovations. Most of the federal and provincial funding sources accessible to the region for food programs cannot cover this type of expense.

Local organizations struggle to respond to the great demand for emergency food aid due to lack of financial as well as human resources. The pressure is great on the employees of community organizations and local community service centres (CLSCs), who are required to deal with the issue of lack of food on top of responding to many other health needs that are just as urgent.

Finally, the programs for food aid and those for developing food-related skills (cooking, gardening, etc.) have limited impacts on food security in the absence of lasting, structural change in the food system, and this at the socioeconomic level and in terms of living conditions. The high cost of food, the high number of low-income families, climate change and lack of shipping infrastructure are all factors that greatly contribute to the alarming rates of food insecurity in Nunavik.

Importance of the Traditional Diet

The traditional Inuit diet includes foods obtained through hunting, fishing and gathering (berries, plants, algae, mussels and so forth). In general, the nutritional value of these foods exceeds that of store-bought foods. According to data from the Qanuillirpita? survey of 2017, consumption of traditional foods was positively linked to iron status and reduced prevalence of iron deficiency.²

Again according to the abovementioned survey, in terms of preferences, 96% of the population stated a preference for consuming either only traditional foods or a combination of store-bought foods and traditional foods.³ Ninety-three percent

2. Lavoie, A., Lemire, M., Lévesque, B., Ayotte, P. (2020). Iron Deficiency and Anemia. Nunavik Inuit Health Survey 2017 Qanuirlipitaa? How are we now? Québec: Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services (NRBHSS) & *Institut national de santé publique du Québec (INSPQ)*.

3. Unpublished data; report upcoming.

- ✓ Recognize and develop traditional food as a viable socioeconomic sector in order to provide means of subsistence for hunters and food-related entrepreneurs and to create local jobs.
- ✓ Establish integrated wildlife management as a contributing process to food security to ensure the availability of traditional foods for future generations.

Focus 2 – Access to and quality and availability of nutritious, store-bought foods:

- ✓ Improve the quality of imported foods in Nunavik by improving the efficiency of the shipping chain.
- ✓ Improve economic access to food by making prices affordable and increasing families' purchasing power.
- ✓ Increase the communities' and families' capacity to access fresh, nutritious food by producing it locally.
- ✓ Improve children's food security by reinforcing food-aid initiatives and improving the quality of the food provided in schools and day-cares.

Focus 3 – Support for development of knowledge and skills:

- ✓ Offer more opportunities to learn hunting, fishing and gathering skills, particularly to children.
- ✓ Help Nunavimmiut make healthier food choices through nutrition education and strengthening of skills.
- ✓ Reinforce the capacities, skills and confidence of food-sector entrepreneurs and the next generation of leaders in the Inuit food sector.

Focus 4 – Partnership, engagement and community decision making:

- ✓ Reinforce the commitment of Nunavimmiut to food security through education, lobbying, mobilization and community decision making.

