



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 012

Thursday, December 10, 2020

Chair: Mr. Bob Bratina



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• (1120)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Bob Bratina (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.)): We have quorum. Accordingly, I call meeting 12 of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs to order.

We start with the acknowledgement that we're meeting on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

The committee is continuing its study of food security in northern communities.

Once again, you should be on the language of your choice, in the globe at the bottom centre of your screen, so that interpretation can present you with the language in which you speak. Please speak slowly and clearly. You should be on mute if you are not speaking.

Joining us today is the president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Natan Obed.

Mr. Obed, please go ahead for six minutes.

Mr. Natan Obed (President, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, everyone in this committee, for inviting me.

I am Natan Obed, and I am the president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national representation organization for Canada's 65,000 Inuit.

The majority of Inuit live within Inuit Nunangat. This is our homeland. It encompasses 51 communities and covers almost one-third of Canada's land mass and over 50% of Canada's coastline. There are four Inuit regions across Inuit Nunangat: Inuvialuit in the west, Nunavut central and east, and then Nunavik and Nunatsiavut.

The last time this committee studied northern food security issues was 10 years ago, when it looked at the transition of the federal food mail program to nutrition north. Inuit put forward a lot of different testimony during that time, and much of it remains unchanged today.

The food insecurity status of Inuit communities still stands in stark contrast to the situation seen in the rest of Canada; 76% of Inuit aged 15 or over living in Inuit Nunangat experience food insecurity. This is based on Canada's 2017 aboriginal peoples survey. The regional breakdown varies slightly, but it still remains that over three-quarters of Inuit suffer from food insecurity.

There are many different concerns that are raised because of food insecurity. They are interrelated with poverty, with the ability to practise our culture and with the ability to pass on language. Food

insecurity links into other issues, such as education. This committee has talked quite a bit to and has learned quite a bit from people representing Inuit, who talked about the inequities that Inuit face, compared to non-indigenous Canadians.

Poverty is the main driver of food insecurity in Inuit Nunangat. It's a complex issue, where the cost of living is so much higher than in the rest of Canada, while the incomes are so much lower. The median income for Inuit living in Inuit Nunangat is approximately \$23,000, and the cost of living is between two and three times the Canadian average, depending upon the community in Inuit Nunangat.

The pandemic has further illustrated the socio-economic inequities and infrastructure gaps that our remote communities face. I shared these realities with the committee recently, but today I want to emphasize that these deficits have significant impacts on our food costs, as well as the potential of our harvesting economy, local food production initiatives, and both our inshore and offshore fisheries.

The pandemic has also highlighted the fragility in our own unique food supply chains. Most of our non-perishable food items are shipped through summer sealift resupply seasons. There are only a couple of hubs in this country from where those non-perishable food items start, and the largest by far is in Montreal. With shutdowns of economies, with concerns for the free flow of goods and services, this past season's resupply was very different and had some risk to it, which then had overarching risk for the way in which non-perishable items get to our communities.

We've been working through a number of our food insecurity policy areas within the Inuit-Crown partnership committee. There is a food security working group that led to some changes to the nutrition north program, specifically within the harvesters support grant, in which Inuit have accessed \$28.6 million over five years to implement supports for traditional harvesting programs.

• (1125)

We need to apply the Inuit Nunangat approach across all federal departments to accelerate the work of this particular Inuit-Crown partnership committee working group. We need to understand how best to support Inuit, especially when it comes to improving social programs, improving access to healthy foods and also improving the ability for Inuit to practise traditional activities.

Infrastructure is key in all of this as well. We have such infrastructure deficits within Inuit Nunangat, whether it's within our airports, our small craft harbours, local food storage facilities, harvesting infrastructure or supply chain infrastructure. We need to improve all levels of our infrastructure in order to have more food-secure communities.

The Chair: We're at time, Mr. Obed, right there. Of course, if there is anything that doesn't get covered in the round of questioning, you can certainly submit further written testimony.

In view of the delay in starting, we'll have time for one full round of questioning of Mr. Obed from each of the parties represented in our committee, starting with Cathy McLeod for six minutes.

Mrs. McLeod, please go ahead.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Certainly, as we had hoped to get two, I might be sharing some of my time with our second speaker.

Mr. Obed, I know you were cut off a little bit. Were you heading toward some very specific recommendations? Certainly I'd like to hear specifically what you would like to see in terms of committee recommendations.

• (1130)

Mr. Natan Obed: Yes, thank you.

I have a couple of key recommendations. One is in regard to northern airlines and the qualification of northern airlines as an essential service, and making that terminology, "essential service", have some terms and conditions associated with it.

Also, about the nutrition north program, we need to ensure that it acts as an accountable and transparent social program so that Inuit families in Inuit communities are the ones benefiting from the subsidy.

Another one is to make long-term sustainable investments in Inuit Nunangat: specific school food programs and other local food production and local food distribution initiatives.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

You talked about how welcome the changes to the harvesters support program were. It was interesting; we heard testimony from the Yukon the other day that they have things like mobile abattoirs. Do you have any local challenges in terms of...territorial issues that create challenges in moving forward with the harvesting program?

Mr. Natan Obed: I think there are ongoing challenges from a regulatory perspective. When we are able to harvest more food and when we are able to provide for our families, that doesn't necessarily always extend to long-term support homes or educational institu-

tions where there are regulations, whether they be federal, provincial or territorial, for food consumption and food safety, which often don't take into consideration any respect for Inuit-specific food preparation and considerations for food safety.

That has been a huge challenge for us in producing sustainable traditional food businesses, because we get into the regulatory issues right away, where the way in which we prepare our food isn't necessarily recognized by the institutional standards.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you.

I've heard about that challenge before, and I would expect it's mostly a territorial issue.

I'll now turn my time over to my colleague Eric.

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Thank you, Cathy. I appreciate that.

I'll pick up on the same topic of NNC, nutrition north Canada.

Mr. Obed, you mentioned that the program has to act more like a social program and be more accountable and transparent. In some of the testimony that we heard at our last meeting, the department officials actually said that food security itself wasn't really a measure of success for that program, so I do agree with you and I think there definitely have to be some changes made in that respect.

I'm curious as to whether you can expand a bit more on how you think this program might be able to be changed to be more accountable and more transparent to people living in the north.

Mr. Natan Obed: I'll start by saying that the nutrition north program and its predecessor, the food mail program, are both welcome subsidy programs for Inuit Nunangat and other parts of Canada's north, which are more expensive to operate in.

Non-perishable food items cost more, in large part because of the transportation and all the other infrastructure and costs of infrastructure, even within co-ops and northern stores within our communities. Those cost more to run, so it makes sense then that items might be more expensive.

However, if the Government of Canada is going to get into deciding what foods should be subsidized, and then subsidize those foods that reflect concerns with nutrition, healthy diets and healthy lifestyles of Canadians, then \$70 million to \$80 million will be spent by the federal government every year trying to provide a social program and in many cases deciding what foods should be eaten in Inuit Nunangat communities.

There should be more self-determination for Inuit within the portion of the subsidy that is for Inuit. Because of our food insecurity—it's at 76%—these funds should go to people who are food-insecure. There should be a tangible, positive influence of this subsidy for those individuals who are in need of food. A rebate at till that is just a short computation of numbers that are not in any way accountable or transparent will never allow for this program to be seen as successful.

Until we solve that, there will always be Inuit in communities who do not believe that the nutrition north program is actually addressing their food security needs.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Obed.

Mr. van Koeverden, you have six minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Adam van Koeverden (Milton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Nakurmiik, thanks, Mr. Obed for coming back. It's nice to see you again at committee.

Thank you for your statement and your witness testimony, but also thank you for the Inuit-specific food policy. I haven't read the entire thing yet, but it's been good to go through it. It's a lot to read but it's also really important, I think, that everybody on the committee read it.

Earlier this week, we heard from other northern officials who talked about their struggles, so it's wonderful to hear from you and to hear specific concerns about people living in Inuit Nunangat. The numbers, I think, need to be highlighted. As you said, three out of four Inuit have food insecurity, which is a remarkable number. I think it bears repeating, and I think we should dwell on that.

I had a good discussion recently with somebody who's working on food security across Canada, and his remarks were that the solution to hunger in Canada isn't actually food. In its specific food policy, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami talks a lot about income and housing as leading causes of food insecurity.

In your previous visits to this committee, you've talked about the difference between subsidies and social programs. I was wondering if you could connect the dots a little bit for the committee today by discussing the differences between subsidies and social programs, and the important connection between income and the high cost of housing as it relates to people and hunger in the north, specifically in Inuit Nunangat. *Nakurmiik*.

Mr. Natan Obed: Yes. I'll start by giving an example.

Our median income, Inuit median income in Inuit Nunangat, is \$23,000. For non-Inuit living in Inuit Nunangat, that number is in excess of \$95,000. There's huge disparity between Inuit and non-Inuit within every one of our communities, yet the nutrition north program is need-blind, so the family that has a median income that is three to four times that of another family is going to the store and getting the same subsidy for the same items.

On a universal approach for a food insecurity challenge, I don't believe that if we're going to spend money we should be spending money on anyone but those most in need. I know there are chal-

lenges for everybody who lives in Inuit Nunangat, no matter the median income, because of the high cost of living, the high cost of housing and the high cost of food, but we design social programs in all other parts of the country that are designed to ensure there is a foundation for all Canadians, whether that's social assistance or specific programs for people with disabilities or with certain eligibilities for certain portions of the population so that there is a base level standard of living that all Canadians can enjoy.

Right now, the nutrition north program would be an excellent program to ensure that there is a base level of food security for Inuit in Inuit Nunangat. You're already spending the money. We need it to be a targeted social program that Inuit can benefit from directly. There can be a clear call and response for the need and then a policy intervention. Right now, it is just a universal benefit, much like it is in the CRA world for the northern residents deduction. It's something that everybody gets and that everybody gets equally.

We need something more targeted. Whether that is an addition to the nutrition north program or a rethinking of the nutrition north program, this issue is too important and the measure of disparity is so severe that it demands action.

• (1140)

Mr. Adam van Koeverden: Thank you for that.

You used the term “need-blind”, which I think is really important. How would a change in the nutrition north program impact other people, the other quarter? How would it have an impact on the people who are living and working in the north? Would it terribly inflate the cost of food and living for people who are earning a good income? Would it make it...? As you said, there are burdens on everybody who lives in Inuit Nunangat, not just Inuit. How do we get around that?

Mr. Natan Obed: I think the key consideration in the change from the food mail program to nutrition north was to let the markets decide pricing. Competition was meant to replace the single Canada Post subsidy for freight.

Our communities are quite small. There usually are only two or three retailers selling food in a community, and even sometimes only one. Nutrition north changed that landscape quite significantly. I can't tell you.... I don't necessarily believe in the rebate at till numbers, so I'm not sure if that two litres of milk really would be \$14 if there wasn't a food mail subsidy attached to it.

I'd love to be able to talk more and to understand more about what negative effects there might be for those who might not be eligible for a particular specified subsidy for those who are food-insecure, but really, we don't have the accountability or transparency to understand what those costs are at this moment.

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Obed.

We go now to Madame Bérubé for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Obed, you talked about the food insecurity and malnutrition that disproportionately affects Inuit communities. You also said that from a socio-economic perspective, the pandemic is having an impact on costs and the fishery.

Can you tell me about the causes and consequences of food insecurity in the regions of Nunavut, Nunavik and Nunatsiavut? Actually, there's a small difference in these regions when it comes to food security.

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: Yes, thank you.

The cost of pursuing traditional livelihoods and providing food for our families in a very traditional way is expensive. We use Ski-Doos. We use boats in the summer. There are tremendous costs for gas and other supplies to hunt.

In the COVID response, especially the first response in the spring when there was initial money for the indigenous community support fund, many of our Inuit land claim regions provided support for people to go on the land: to go harvest, to go spend the spring and summer in seasonal camps and to get out of communities to decrease the risk of contracting COVID. It also allowed for an increased level of reliance on our traditional diet and increased our food security, if you will.

It's been a big challenge for many Inuit to be able to access their traditional homelands, to harvest in our lands and then to provide for our families and our communities in a more traditional way, because of the costs associated with it. Then also there is the lack of income that many Inuit have to be able to support that type of lifestyle.

It is an interesting dilemma, but it's one that has its roots in colonization and the disenfranchisement and disempowerment of Inuit through the killing of dogs and dog teams, the coerced relocation into communities and the push for a wage-based economy. There have been 50 or 60 years of a push for Inuit not to rely on our own society and our own food, and we're only now trying to get that back. Subsidies are necessary. Grant programs are necessary to help us do that in this space.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You talked earlier about partnerships. Can you explain to us what approaches you've taken to create partnerships to help Inuit communities?

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: At the ITK level, we have partnerships with our regional land claim organizations: Nunavut Tunngavik, Makivik Corporation, Inuvialuit Regional Corporation and the Nunatsiavut government. We work together to create our national policies and our national priorities. We actually are in the final

stages of creating a national food security strategy, which hopefully we will release in the first quarter of 2021.

We also have partnerships at the community level. Sometimes these are with community-based organizations, sometimes with hunter and trapper organizations, sometimes with hamlets and different municipalities, to ensure that.... Sometimes it's for storage space. Sometimes it's for running programs. Sometimes it's for food distribution. We also work with provincial and territorial governments on food security strategies and on poverty reduction.

You'll hear more about that, I believe, in the second hour from regional leaders. No matter what, we are trying to work with whoever is willing to ensure that we can do more for food security for Inuit Nunangat.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: When talking about Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the issue of food security needs to be addressed with a holistic approach. Could you explain what a holistic approach to food security would entail?

[*English*]

Mr. Natan Obed: Food security is tied so much to education, to housing and to health. It also ties into culture and to knowledge, and passing knowledge from generation to generation.

With over 50% overcrowding in our homes, combined with the poverty levels and food insecurity levels that we have, it's a challenge for Inuit to move beyond those scenarios.

Food insecurity at a household level is so complicated, because you might have 11 or 12 people living in one household, and it's a challenging environment, not only to sleep and to remain healthy, but also just to be able to prepare food, to share food and to provide food for an entire family.

There are a lot of challenges and consequences of those scenarios that lead to unhealthy food choices or food insecurity for certain members of a large family.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Obed.

We will go on to our final questioner.

You have six minutes, Ms. Blaney. Please go ahead.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Obed, for your testimony today. It was very important and helpful.

First, you talked about infrastructure and the infrastructure specifically related to food security. Is there any sort of gap analysis of what that is? How could the committee better understand what those gaps are and what is required to begin to fill them?

Mr. Natan Obed: ITK recently released a report that we partnered with Deloitte on. It's in regard to our infrastructure needs and also to specific priority projects for infrastructure across Inuit Nunangat. It isn't specifically in relation to food security, but a number of the challenges that we face are holistic. The challenge in the lack of marine infrastructure links completely with our ability to go and harvest locally, or with food distribution networks.

Think about sealift. In most communities without docks, it complicates the resupply immeasurably. You have to then offload to a barge; you have to go into tidal areas, and then there has to be heavy equipment that offloads the barge and then takes that to another place before a person can access the resupply. Think of the costs that this particular lack of infrastructure causes, on top of the costs that already exist because of the remoteness of Inuit communities.

Also, in the winter—and even in the summer—not having any temperature-stable refrigeration at any or most of our airports causes many of our non-perishable food items to be at risk of either freezing or becoming contaminated in a matter of minutes, especially for freezing. If that cargo sits outside at -40°C for 30 minutes, all of that money in nutrition north—that subsidy to get food to a community—is wasted.

Those are the types of challenges that we have with the lack of infrastructure.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you for that.

You also talked about a lack of local food production initiatives and resources to start those initiatives. Could you just talk a little bit about that? I hear loud and clear that getting people connected with the resources there is something that needs to be invested in.

Mr. Natan Obed: Yes. In the last couple of years, we've had a number of different breakthroughs. The harvesters support grant within the nutrition north Canada program will allow for regional Inuit organizations to work with communities to design food security interventions that allow for more traditional food to be accessed and to be eaten within our communities. That not only does wonders for our food security, but it also helps with the transmission of culture and the connections that individuals have within a community. It builds community.

There are also a number of different initiatives that are happening across Inuit Nunangat from, say, Arviat local gardening and community-based solutions for local food production to different programs from different community-based organizations that allow for food security and cooking classes.

There are so many things that are happening across Inuit Nunangat, but we need more investment and we need more of a focus on community-based solutions and less of a focus on ideas that other people might think are great for us but are things that don't really have a lot of bearing on what we would like to do.

• (1155)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

My last question is around nutrition north. You talked several times about it needing to be a more transparent program, that this program is deciding what food goes. You said there has to be self-determination, and that the rebate is at the till and there just isn't transparency, which sounds to me to be leading to the community not feeling that they trust the program.

Could you talk about what the solution is? When you talk about self-determination, how would that be implemented?

Mr. Natan Obed: No matter what, a healthy diet, a health lifestyle and healthy food choices are subjective. Inuit society and Inuit communities might have a very specific idea about what healthy foods fit within an Inuit-specific diet. If there are tens of millions of dollars every year earmarked for Inuit communities and the majority of the nutrition north subsidy services Inuit Nunangat communities but Inuit don't control the eligible items list or the rate of subsidy, then it's just another program that decides for Inuit what is important to Inuit.

We need to have partnership within this program and real decision-making around the eligible items. We need to reimagine this program as a social program, and we need to ensure that every dollar that's spent on this program goes to those who need it. I don't think that's asking too much of a social program or a federal government program. If the federal government wants to subsidize airlines or wants to subsidize retailers, that should be something that is very specific and separate from wanting to do something about 76% food insecurity for Inuit in Inuit Nunangat.

The Chair: That just about brings us to time.

Mr. Obed, regrettably, we were constrained by the technical issue. In the couple of minutes we have before noon, is there anything that you'd like the committee to hear?

Once again, please submit any other testimony you wish in a written form, but as we have you on the mike now, is there anything you'd like to conclude with before we suspend?

Mr. Natan Obed: First, my apologies for the microphone issue. I pledge to figure this out on my end for the next time I'm in front of you.

In regard to food security, this is completely interrelated with poverty. It's also completely interrelated with government programs and policies.

I urge the committee, and you as parliamentarians within your parties, to demand better accountability and transparency for a program that spends \$70-odd million a year in the guise of providing nutritious, non-perishable food items to northern and remote communities. We need this program to work in order to alleviate food insecurity for our people. I think that no matter who you are, that's an idea you can get behind. I hope that there can be breakthroughs in the way in which we think about what we spend our money on.

In terms of the nutrition north program, there is a shining star there. That is the idea that we can spend money for non-perishable, healthy food to reach Inuit Nunangat communities and alleviate food insecurity. It's not necessarily what's happening now, and I would love to see that happen.

There is a much larger issue, rather than just nutrition north. Our food security strategy that is coming out in the new year will touch on a holistic nature of achieving food security for Inuit. I look forward to sharing this with the committee when it is approved by our board.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Obed. Thanks for joining us.

We're going to suspend briefly while we conclude the other sound checks with our remaining guests.

This meeting is temporarily suspended.

• (1155) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1215)

The Chair: I'm going to call this meeting back to order, with the committee continuing its study of food security in northern communities.

With us today, by video conference, are three groups of witnesses. We had the chair and CEO of Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Duane Ningaqsik Smith, who unfortunately had to leave us but will be providing written testimony. For the rest, we are delighted to be able, despite the technical problems, to speak to you about the situation in your communities regarding food security.

Our first speaker, for six minutes, is Adamic Delisle Alaku, executive vice-president at the department of environment, wildlife and research at Makivik Corporation.

Mr. Alaku, you have six minutes, please.

Mr. Adamic Delisle Alaku (Vice-President, Department of Environment, Wildlife and Research, Makivik Corporation): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and committee members.

I'm pleased to speak to you today on the topic of food security in the north, especially for Nunavik region, and on behalf of president and former senator Charlie Watt Sr.

Nunavik is an Arctic region that occupies the top third of the province of Quebec. We are north of the 55th parallel. Our region is bigger than the size of France. We have 15 communities on the shores of Hudson Bay, Hudson Strait and Ungava Bay. The total population is over 12,000. Think of it as an island. The only way to get there is by air year-round and by ship in the summer months.

Our remoteness greatly affects our food security. While southern Canada benefits from vast road and rail networks paid for by taxpayers, Inuit pay all taxes, yet the infrastructure gaps that exist in our airport facilities and the total lack of deep water ports contribute to driving up food prices and food wastage.

Food security exists when all human beings at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, healthy and nutritious food enabling them to lead healthy, active lives. Food insecurity exists when an individual or a family does not have access to sufficient food. In the context of Nunavik, it is important to consider access to both traditional foods and healthy store-bought foods in improving food security.

The University of Laval has conducted studies comparing the cost of living in Nunavik and southern Quebec. These revealed that in 2011 groceries cost 81% more in Nunavik compared to Quebec City. "The Cost of Living in Nunavik" research report was the result of a 16-month intensive data collection and analysis between January 2015 and 2016, in which 450 randomly selected households in six Nunavik communities on the Hudson and Ungava coasts were selected for this project.

The survey revealed that low-income households spend a combined total of over 70% of their income on food and shelter, 43% on food and 27% on shelter. If you take a look at income, based on the 2016 census, median income for Inuit was just over \$25,627, and for a non-Inuit it was \$79,328. Inuit make three times less income, so if groceries cost 81% more and income is three times less than in the south, it all adds up to considerable food insecurity and additional social consequences to physical and mental health.

Programs such as nutrition north Canada help reduce the high cost of living, but they are not enough. Our region has created additional programs that we call the Nunavik cost-of-living reduction measures—administered by the KRG, the Kativik Regional Government, and negotiated with the help of Makivik—to go beyond the nutrition north program. There are six measures to help reduce cost of living: elders assistance; airfare reduction; country food community support program; household appliances and harvesting equipment program; food and other essentials program, which provides rebates of between 15% and 35% on the majority of food items purchased in Nunavik; and a gasoline program, with a discount of 40¢ on the litre on gas. The price of gas is set once a year in Nunavik. It comes by seafloat. Right now a litre of gas costs \$1.85. In Ottawa, on December 8, gas prices ranged from 90.9¢ at Costco to 94.9¢ at Canadian Tire.

Under the cost-of-living reduction program, the Government of Quebec committed to pay \$115.8 million over the next six years, starting in 2019.

For us, however, food from the south is only one part of the picture when it comes to the food that we eat. The food that we hunt is just as important, if not more important, because it not only feeds us physically but feeds us culturally and spiritually as well. Inuit food security includes culture, health and wellness, and food sovereignty—our decision-making power and management over our food resources.

• (1220)

We are members of numerous wildlife committees. In addition, Makivik has owned and operated the Nunavik Research Centre, based in Kuujuaq, for decades. We conduct our own research directly on country food that we eat, and control this information. That's part of what we consider our food security.

The new harvesters support grant was well received. Subsistence harvesting is vital to our food security. We need to underline, however, that at the time this program is being rolled out we are experiencing restrictions on polar bear, beluga and soon caribou harvesting. The Inuit population is growing and pressures on wildlife population are high. It's vital for us to be able to access wildlife. It's also important for communities to have the capacity to become fully involved in wildlife monitoring and management.

Let us talk about some of the projects that exist in our region. The Pirursiivik project in Inukjuak on the Hudson Bay, in collaboration with Makivik, the One Drop Foundation, the RBC Foundation and the Sirivik food centre, has created a year-round greenhouse focused on growing traditional plants and gardening.

The hydroponics container in Kuujuaq—you may have seen The Growcer on CBC's *Dragons' Den*—is a shipping container, completely self-contained, designed to assist indigenous communities in remote regions, especially in the Arctic. This project provides fresh vegetables for us in Kuujuaq. Also in Kuujuaq, we have a soup kitchen, a food box program for elders and an on-the-land program.

• (1225)

The Chair: We're out of time. I'm sorry, Mr. Alaku.

Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku: If you may indulge me, I am on my conclusion.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku: In Puvirnituk, we have a food box program delivery in collaboration with the local health centre. There are family houses in Puvirnituk, Kangiqsujuaq, Salluit, Kangiqsualujuaq and Kuujuarapik. Most have a variety of food programs, including cooking activities, meal sharing and food boxes for the needy.

In conclusion, Mr. Chair and committee members, it is clear that many factors contribute to food insecurity in the region. While we appreciate programs such as nutrition north and the harvesters support grant from the federal side, you can see that this takes a combined effort to address the issue. This includes the Province of Quebec, Nunavik organizations working together, grassroots projects and additional assistance from outside the region.

Nakurmiik.

The Chair: Thank you.

Just for the knowledge of our committee and our guests, we'll have to conclude at one o'clock sharp for further issues not related to our committee, but there are constraints on our ability to extend the time.

Next, we have Mr. Johannes Lampe, president of the Nunatsiavut Government.

Please go ahead for six minutes, Mr. Lampe.

Hon. Johannes Lampe (President, Nunatsiavut Government): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will start with food security background information and key messages.

Food security is defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as follows: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."

The right to adequate food is a human right affirmed in multiple human rights instruments, and the Government of Canada is obligated to respect, promote and uphold this right. The Government of Canada ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1976. It is a binding international treaty that affirms the right to adequate food under article 11, which states:

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.

The committee responsible for managing the implementation of the covenant has clarified the meaning of the right to adequate food as follows:

The availability of food in a quantity and quality sufficient to satisfy the dietary needs of individuals, free from adverse substances, and acceptable within a given culture;

The accessibility of such food in ways that are sustainable and that do not interfere with the enjoyment of other human rights.

I will now turn to food insecurity rates in Nunatsiavut.

[English]

The Chair: We can't hear.

Mr. James Eetoolook: I will proceed in English.

The Chair: Please, go ahead.

Mr. James Eetoolook: Rates of food insecurity are at critical levels. We know that food insecurity directly affects individual health and well-being, as poor nutrition is linked to increased risk of chronic diseases. It lowers the learning capacity of our children and it has a detrimental impact on mental health.

Access to nutritious foods is not just necessary for individual well-being, but also for achieving broader public health objectives. Food insecurity threatens our cultural integrity, our overall social stability and has devastating effects on economic development. In the north, absolutely everyone is affected, even the food-secure.

Simply stated, healthy people perform better in all aspects of life. We all know that. As Nunavut's economy develops, so too must the health of its population.

The COVID-19 pandemic further revealed the immediate need to address the severity of food insecurity experienced by too many Inuit families and highlighted the important role that food programs play in our communities.

When the schools were forced to close, school food programs—which were utilized by all of the students in most of the communities in Nunavut—were suddenly no longer available. This removed the one guaranteed meal a day for many. That's a lot. In fact, the Inuit health survey found that seven in 10 Inuit kids go to school hungry in Nunavut every single day.

It is a complex issue in Nunavut. The high cost of market food, our remote location, the decline in some animal stocks, population increases and changing hunting quotas contribute to the declining food security in Nunavut communities. I should say that the caribou in Baffin Island are only 255 a year for the largest population of Inuit and others in that region. We also have quotas on the beluga and on narwhal. It's very limited.

Climate change also poses a specific threat to food security in Nunavut because of its devastating effects on the availability of wildlife. We are seeing more than ever the changing migration patterns and reduction in caribou herds. The Government of Nunavut released survey results in 2013 claiming that the southern Baffin caribou herd had declined by 95% in the last 20 years.

Our rapidly changing environment is also posing a greater threat to the traditional hunting practices of Inuit. With sea ice breaking up early and unpredictably from year to year, the risks—

● (1240)

The Chair: Mr. Eetoolook, we're way over time and we have to be finished by one o'clock. I'm going to ask you to stop there.

I'm going to go to our questioners and perhaps they can pick up more of your speech. For anything that was missed, please submit the written testimony to our committee.

I'm going to ask the committee members to do five minutes each, which will enable us to squeeze in the first round.

Mr. Melillo, can you go ahead, please, for five minutes?

Mr. Eric Melillo: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all of our witnesses for joining us today to talk about this important subject.

I would like to start with President Lampe. I've been doing a little bit of reading about the situation in Labrador. As I understand, the amount of food that is produced in Labrador is relatively low. One of the articles I was reading said that as little as 1% of the food consumed in Labrador is actually produced there.

Can you talk a bit about any programs or initiatives that your government has been working towards to increase harvesting capacity in your territory and how the federal government can help with those initiatives?

Hon. Johannes Lampe: Most certainly, as Natan Obed said earlier, we depend on different types of programs to help us with subsidies to try to lower the food prices that Labrador Inuit have to pay at the stores. That may help, but it's still very costly to purchase food items at the northern store or at the other store, which is the competition. Still, the food prices are pretty similar. We who are able to go shopping at these stores are able to buy almost everything we need.

I'd like to take the example of a single mother with four children who has been left by her spouse and who is trying to make ends meet and trying to get her children to school on time. These children are going to school hungry. There are breakfast programs in Nunatsiavut. However, again, you have to get up early in the morning to make that breakfast program, and without a bus, some of these children have to walk two kilometres to school. To see children trying to make it to school at -30°C in a big snowstorm.... It's very hard to see. We are trying to help our kids of school age and their single mothers.

At the same time, we do have community freezers to help our community residents pick up Arctic char or seal meat. This had to happen because our main staple food, the George River caribou herd, was banned 13-plus years ago. Our main staple has not come back. That's just one of the major things that have made food insecurity a lot harder than it had been. We hope the George River caribou herd will come back.

• (1245)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Hon. Johannes Lampe: There are also food banks that those who need food can go to. But again—

The Chair: Mr. Lampe, I'm sorry to have to interrupt. We're right at time, and we're rushing toward our one o'clock deadline.

Our next questioner for five minutes is Yvonne Jones.

Ms. Jones, go ahead, please.

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Good morning, everyone.

Thank you, President Lampe, President Eetoolook and my good friend Adamie, for your presentations this morning. It's always good to hear each of you speak. I know this is a topic you could talk about for many hours, at length, because you're living it every single day. You know it better than anyone I know.

I'm going to ask one brief question. Like all of my colleagues on this panel today, I wish that I could ask you many, many questions. I don't know how the chair feels, but I would really welcome the opportunity to invite you back to our committee. I think your perspective is going to be very important to us as we determine our recommendations to the federal government going forward. I make that suggestion.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I know the Government of Canada made allocations that were Inuit-specific. They were allocated to each of the Inuit governments in Canada. A lot of it was geared towards food security and heat security.

How did you find that benefit and that program? Is this something you could see, going forward, that would make a huge difference in your communities in meeting food insecurity for people on low income?

Please feel free to start, whoever wishes to do so.

Hon. Johannes Lampe: Thank you, Yvonne.

That's certainly a question that is important for the MPs of Canada to understand. It's most certainly important if Canada is going to be responsible and not stop right here and now but continue to look at the food insecurity question. There are many questions that even our children and our grandchildren are asking their parents and grandparents. They are asking why it is that they cannot afford to get what other kids are able to get. Certainly at this time of year, the season is supposed to be a happy time for children, and a lot of our children are going hungry, not being able to help their single mother, you know.

We are doing all that we can, and the COVID-19 support is a godsend. It is most certainly important to Inuit across Nunangat, so we appreciate that. We really appreciate what Canada is doing.

We are into our second round of support for COVID. We had to suspend the support for some time while we reviewed whether we were doing it right, whether we were doing enough, and how we should change what we were doing. We were looking at a cut-off for how much people made. Was that cut-off too low? Did we have to raise that cut-off level for what people made annually? We had to review the COVID support that we were doing in Nunatsiavut.

When we suspended the support, people were crying. They were asking why the support was cut off, why it was suspended. Now we have put it back on, and certainly with winter coming up and with not having the caribou and not being able to...like the single mother having to decide whether to pay the light bill, get food or get the heating on for her children. These questions are very important and they are not coming from leaders across Nunangat but from individuals who are living—

• (1250)

The Chair: Mr. Lampe, I have to interrupt. We need to move to our next questioner.

Madame Bérubé, you have five minutes. Please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: My question is for Mr. Alaku.

In December 2018, in Kuujjuarapik, the fourth working session for the development of a food-security policy in Nunavik was held to develop a regional food security policy.

Can you tell us about the recommendations stemming from that meeting?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, Madame Bérubé, but we didn't hear the translation. Could you please repeat the question?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Okay.

My question is for Mr. Alaku.

In December 2018, in Kuujjuarapik, the fourth working session for the development of a food-security policy in Nunavik was held to develop a regional food security policy.

Can you tell us about the recommendations stemming from that meeting?

Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku: Ms. Bérubé, I don't have exactly all the recommendations that have been made, but many of our recommendations relate to infrastructure. We've reached a point where our airports are no longer able to meet the demand.

We went from Twin Otters to Hawker Siddeley 748s, and then from Hawker Siddeley 748s to Dash-8-100s. Currently, Dash-8-100s and Dash-8-300s are used, but they no longer meet the demand.

We need to expand our airports. We don't have a port to facilitate the unloading of ships during the summer period, when we can bring in the products.

Personally, I don't have a report. So I won't be able to give the answer to your question. Having said that, there are many recommendations that deal with what more can be done in terms of federal government assistance.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Could you elaborate on your proposed recommendations?

• (1255)

Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku: We recommend expanding our infrastructure. There are very big gaps, especially in the Internet. The Internet barely works. We don't have fibre optics. As I said, if we could expand our airports, we could have Q400s. Q400s are larger aircraft that can hold more people and carry more cargo. Right now, there are infrastructure gaps. These are all kinds of recommendations that we have.

Makivik and Air Inuit have invested heavily in infrastructure. Private funds are being used to build warehouses so that we can help the stores with storage and refrigeration. It's difficult, because it's mostly our personal and private funds that are being used to improve our region. We need a lot of help from the federal government.

This is one of our recommendations: there must be investment in our infrastructure.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: So you are telling us that you aren't really receiving any assistance from the federal government and that this support won't allow you to foster development in Nunavik.

Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku: What I'm saying is that our population has grown, and most of the infrastructure has been paid for by Makivik. The arenas, the community centres, the exhibition halls, the snowmobile stores, all of this is infrastructure that was paid for by Makivik, with the help of Air Inuit.

We're not meeting demand. Demand is increasing, and we need the help of all our partners, federal and provincial, to meet the current demand.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: With regard to food security, what is the current situation in Nunavik?

Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku: As Mr. Obed mentioned, we have huge restrictions on local production. We have a lot of seafood—scallops, mussels, char, fish—but there are a lot of restrictions and obstacles. Food inspections and government regulations restrict the use of local and regional resources.

We could provide healthy food to the communities. Instead of buying cheeseburgers and fries, people could buy very good food.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Okay. Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Blaney, you have five minutes. Go ahead, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

First of all, thank you to all the witnesses.

I will come back to you, Mr. Delisle Alaku. You talked to us in your testimony about the fact that the Inuit population is growing and that wildlife monitoring and management is becoming increas-

ingly important, with all the changes and with the populations there going down as well.

I'm just wondering if you could talk about what that would look like and what kind of resources are required to do that work.

Mr. Adamie Delisle Alaku: Thank you very much for that.

We are being restricted more and more in our abilities to harvest. I'll take the example of polar bears. Polar bears are a great source of healthy food for our community, but we are at a clash with scientists. We are saying that polar bear populations are healthy, and then the trends that are projected say that polar bears are not healthy.

We are tremendously restricted on our beluga quotas, and these are a source of tremendously healthy food. Belugas are known to have selenium, which combats mercury levels.

Right now we are going towards a very restrictive caribou harvest going forward, knowing that the Leaf River herd is the only herd that we are harvesting. As President Lampe mentioned, the George River herd is in a critical state, and we do not wish for the Leaf River herd to go in that same direction. We will need to safeguard that herd, and we will need to maybe even look at caribou herding, much like they do in Scandinavia.

We are very restricted in terms of our ability to harvest.

• (1300)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you. That's helpful.

Mr. Eetoolook, could you speak to that as well, about what sort of resources you need and what the concerns are around wildlife monitoring and management?

You just talked as well about the decline in the animals with climate change. I'm just wondering how all those things are coming together with the changing migration. What is it that would help look at that and support more sustainability in your area?

Mr. James Eetoolook: As you know, all the herds in North America were in decline this year, last year and the year before. In order to increase the harvest level, the government has to do a survey of the animal on the total allowable harvest. Sometimes the survey doesn't come out too well. There are a lot of things to take into consideration for the survey, anything that has contributed to the decline of the animal, man-made or man encounters. The biggest problem has been when they changed the migration of the caribou. These are the types of things we face daily and yearly up here.

Also, with the lack of presence of a federal government such as food inspectors, there is a lot of wildlife that we can trade with the other people, but the government says it's not inspected by the proper system. It hampers our trade quite a bit up here in the north.

In terms of most of our diet, such as caribou, narwhal and polar bear, in some communities the polar bear quota is almost down to zero. These are the kinds of things we face every day; otherwise, they would help the nutrition in the north. This is our main diet, anything that is.... Man encounters are the biggest problem up here in the north. Hopefully the population of animals will increase again over time, but it takes longer now than in previous years because of man encounters with the wildlife. The migration pattern changes have a lot to do with the decline of the animal.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that remarkable testimony from all of our witnesses. It's almost tragic that we have to suspend

now during this meeting, but I think there's an excellent suggestion from Ms. Jones and we'll talk about inviting you all back. It looks as though we'll be on a bit of a break now for a few weeks.

Mr. Alaku, Mr. Lampe and Mr. Eetoolook, thank you so much.

Thank you to the members of our committee and those who sat in, and to all our staff. I hope you have an excellent holiday season and a merry Christmas if you're celebrating. We'll see you all, including our witnesses, I hope, in the new year.

Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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