



WOMEN IMPROVING COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

This fact sheet presents two examples where women stood strong to improve well-being in their communities affected by resource extraction.

- The first story is about diverse women in Happy Valley-Goose Bay (HV-GB), Labrador. In 2013 and 2014, they worked together to develop a way to measure community well-being. They felt this was needed to reduce the negative impacts that were expected to arise from building of a hydro dam at nearby Muskrat Falls. The result was a Community Vitality Index.
- The second story is about Mi'kmaq women from Pictou Landing First Nation in Nova Scotia. They opposed pollution of Boat Harbour by a local pulp mill and won support from the province to stop the source of this pollution.

In June 2014 women from HV-GB and from Pictou Landing First Nation met and learned from each other's efforts to deal with resource extraction during a FemNorthNet knowledge sharing tour called Building Links. The tour was set up by Mount Saint Vincent University's Professor Deborah Stienstra and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. You can read more and see a film about Building Links on FemNorthNet's web site: <http://fnn.criaw-icref.ca/en/page/building-links>.

Community Women Create a Community Vitality Index

The work to create a Community Vitality Index (CVI) in HV-GB showed how diverse women can develop a lasting, meaningful connection to their community's well-being so they can better deal with changes linked to resource extraction.

The CVI was designed to track changes in their community's well-being.

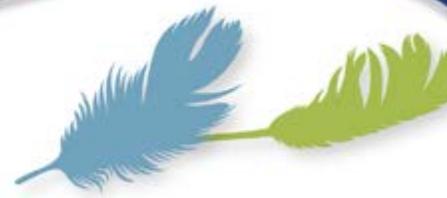
- It was built using the perspectives of many diverse local women.
- It used a participatory method that heard the voices and ideas of local women using Indigenous ways of knowing.
- It adopted a number of feminist principles, and included five elements of well-being that local women defined and agreed upon.

This is one in a series of ten fact sheets on women and resource development and extraction. All of the fact sheets are available at www.fnn.criaw-icref.ca and include additional resources on these topics.

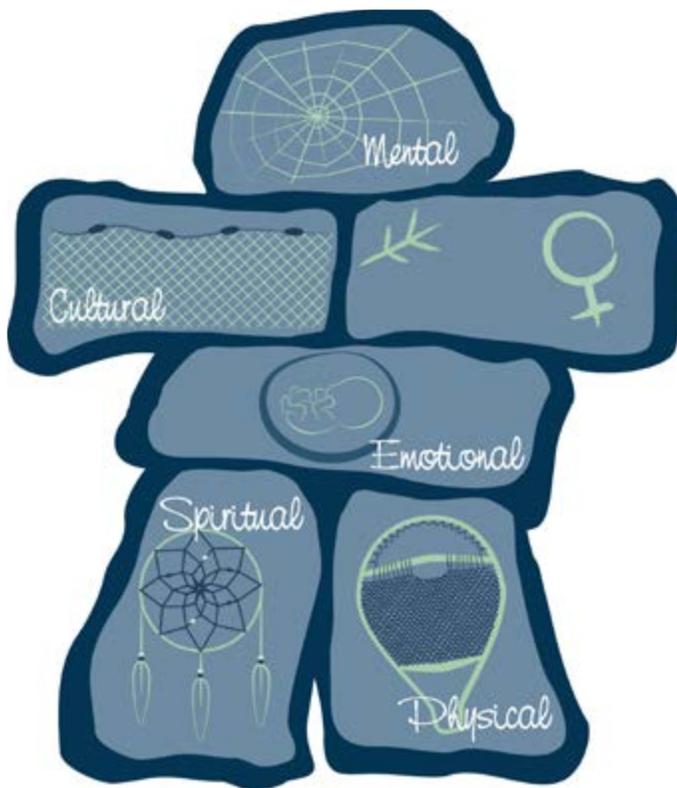
CRIAW-ICREF acknowledges its presence and work on Indigenous Territories. We respectfully recognize the legacy of colonization upon Indigenous Peoples.

This publication was created by CRIAW's Feminist Northern Network. For the full list of contributors refer to our website.





The Index included the mental, cultural, emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects of well-being as defined by local women. Each element was paired with a questionnaire that tracked changes in well-being in a way that was culturally relevant to diverse women in HV-GB.



Graphic designers from Nunatsiavut developed this image for the CVI, which was launched in 2014.

Community women made the CVI a reality

In 2011 during environmental assessment hearings into the impacts of building a dam at Muskrat Falls, Petrina Beals, then executive director of the Mokami Status of Women Council, demanded that Nalcor Energy, the provincial energy company behind the dam, set up a gender-based analysis of the project.

She also called for a baseline study of social issues in the community to help prevent and reduce negative impacts that were expected to come from building the dam. The Council called for a focus on these six priorities:

1. Violence against women
2. Housing
3. Childcare
4. Poverty
5. Mental health
6. Addictions and substance use.

Despite recommendations from both the Mokami Status of Women Council and the Environmental Assessment Panel, the provincial government and Nalcor Energy did not develop systems to monitor changes in the community's well-being. Instead, FemNorthNet members Leah Levac and Deborah Stienstra were able to get research funds to bring diverse, local women together to identify the main elements of well-being and to develop a way to track changes in the community's well-being.

True participation created the Community Vitality Index (CVI)

In 2014, diverse women and organizations in HV-GB worked with academic researchers in a participatory process to develop the CVI. The process encouraged women to

- reach out to each other
- draw on different types of knowledge
- participate in the process of finding participants
- propose ways to collect information (data), and
- build relationships in the community.



Developing the CVI was both a research process and a leadership process. Working together, the research team and community members learned leadership skills and shared knowledge for mutual benefit. The process also sought to better understand the needs and experiences of women with diverse identities.

The way the CVI defined well-being was unique to the women of HV-GB because it included:

- the importance of environmental sustainability
- the need for social support networks and an acceptance of diverse identities
- freedom from violence
- self-worth and self-esteem, and
- being able to make choices that are best for each woman and her family.

It used both visuals and words to describe well-being, and it took into account how the elements of well-being interact at these levels: mental, cultural, spiritual, emotional, and physical.

How the Community Vitality Index (CVI) lives on

Because the CVI will be used over time, it will help local women be part of decision-making because it provides

- data on the community's well-being early in the process of community change related to resource extraction, and
- a set of questions that can help identify new and important community needs as they emerge, to enhance well-being.

As a model that may apply elsewhere, the CVI can assist diverse groups of women to talk about issues that affect them, discuss community well-being, gain more understanding of the impacts of economic changes, and find alternatives that will enhance community well-being.

Thanks to five more years of funding by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), HV-GB will be able to collect more data on community well-being. The new funding will also allow NunatuKavut to create a CVI for communities on the south coast of Labrador.

Boat Harbour and Pictou Landing First Nation, Nova Scotia

Boat Harbour is located in the Mi'kmaq Pictou Landing First Nation, in Pictou County, Nova Scotia. It is known as one of the worst examples of environmental racism in the province.

Since 1967 the Northern Pulp mill (originally Abercrombie Point Pulp and Paper Mill) has used Boat Harbour as a place to dump waste from processing lumber. A beautiful place to fish and swim has become an ugly and dangerous waste pond responsible for above-average cancer rates and other illnesses. The province has kept the mill open and supported it over the years despite its record of pollution. Local people have suffered the ill effects. For years, the Pictou Landing Band Council demanded a shutdown of the polluter, but did not succeed.

What is environmental racism?

It is the placement of toxic industries and other environmental hazards near communities of colour and the working poor. It also refers to the lack of open discussion with communities about the location of these polluters near the communities.



In June 2014, women from Boat Harbour who were organizing for change by tracking the pollution and widespread illness in their community shared their stories with women in HV-GB through FemNorthNet's Building Links project. Visit: <http://fnn.criaw-icref.ca/en/page/building-links>

In May 2015, Nova Scotia's government passed laws to shut down the Northern Pulp mill and end pollution from it by 2020. This result is an important success story that shows the value and power of community organizing.

Local women's crucial role in research and action

Women of the Pictou Landing Native Women's Association (PLNWA) were very concerned about the health impacts of the Boat Harbour pollution and wanted to raise awareness to get action. They approached Dr. Heather Castleden to help because of her experience in community-based participatory research. The question they asked together was: Are we getting sick from Boat Harbour?

The process they developed to get answers is an outstanding example of how to engage, empower, and include women in shaping their communities when faced with the negative impacts of resource extraction. In this collaborative research project, women in the community worked with researchers in all aspects of the research.

- Women developed and conducted household surveys to gather information on the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being of all community members.
- Women collected samples outdoors for data on water, air, and plants.
- Local women became more outspoken as they learned more about the impacts of the Boat Harbour pollution on their community.

As the project continued, six local women decided to share results of their research and their experiences with Boat Harbour pollution through digital stories, available online <http://www.heclab.com/pictou-landing-first-nation/>.

A "Two-Eyed Seeing" approach

The research used a "Two-Eyed Seeing" approach that drew on Western and Indigenous research methods. The approach involved Mi'kmaq ways of knowing and thinking that made sense to the community. It also included historical, environmental, legal, socio-political, and economic research to explain the pollution of Boat Harbour and its effects on local people.

During this research partnership, the Mi'kmaq women of Pictou Landing took control and helped to bring their community one step closer to finally having their concerns fully resolved.

One Mi'kmaq woman, Kim Strickland, said in her video:

"I feel now that I am helping make the change for our community. We are a generation that will not let the different governments tell us it's okay to create environmental disaster in the area our parents and grandparents used to call prime fishing waters."

The Two-Eyed Seeing approach involves learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western knowledge and ways of knowing...and learning to use both eyes together, for the benefit of all.



In summer 2014 protestors in Halifax joined in solidarity with the members of Pictou Landing, demanding the pollution at Boat Harbour be cleaned up. – Photo from the Council of Canadians (2014, licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/))

Local women organize to end Boat Harbour pollution

In June 2014, while members of the Pictou Landing Native Women's Association (PLNWA) were visiting HV-GB, at home an effluent pipe from the pulp mill broke. It created a toxic spill on sacred First Nations burial grounds and nearby wetlands. Women and Elders, including Pictou Landing Chief Andrea Paul, set up a road blockade and demanded that the government stop the pollution by shutting down the Northern Pulp mill and clean up the harbour. The blockade ended in victory for the Mi'kmaq when the environment minister stated that the province would shut down the company mill in Boat Harbour starting in 2015. It also agreed to begin a cleanup of the harbour.

The story of Pictou Landing provided an example of how local women can, and should be, included in decisions that impact their lives and communities. The research framework gave local women full voices in a way that respected their values, needs

and concerns. It was an excellent example of finding balance between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing.

RESOURCES

On the Community Vitality Index:

Beals, P. (2011). Why a Moratorium on Muskrat Falls is Needed. *St. John's Telegram*. Retrieved from <http://fnn.criaw-icref.ca/en/page/happy-valley-goose-bay>

Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women's FemNorthNet. *Community Vitality Index*. Retrieved from <http://fnn.criaw-icref.ca/en/page/community-vitality-index>

Levac, L., Stienstra, D., Beals, P. & McCuaig, J. (Forthcoming). Advancing Intersectional Considerations in Measuring Gender Equality: The participatory development of a community vitality index in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador.

Mokami Status of Women Council with FemNorthNet. (2011). *Out of the Rhetoric and Into the Reality of Local Women's Lives: Submission to the Environmental Assessment Panel on the Lower Churchill Hydro Development*. Retrieved from <http://fnn.criaw-icref.ca/images/userfiles/files/Out%20of%20the%20Rhetoric-FNN-March%2028%202011-2.pdf>

On Boat Harbour:

APTN National News. (2014, March 26). *Pictou Landing researches health effects of polluted harbor* [video]. Retrieved from <http://aptn.ca/news/2014/03/26/pictou-landing-researches-health-effects-polluted-harbor/>



APTN National News. (2015, April 17). *Controversial pulp mill treatment plant near Pictou Landing to close in 2020: province* [video]. Retrieved from <http://aptn.ca/news/2015/04/17/controversial-pulp-mill-treatment-plant-near-pictou-landing-to-close-in-2020-province/>

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) Nova Scotia. (2014, August 5). *Living in the shadow of a polluting pulp mill* [audio clip]. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/informationmornings/2014/08/05/living-in-the-shadow-of-a-polluting-pulp-mill/>

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Suggested citation:

FemNorthNet. (2016). Women Improving Community Well-Being. Resource Development in Northern Communities: Local Women Matter #9. Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women.

On Environmental Racism:

EcoJustice. *Environmental Racism: The first step is recognizing we have a problem*. Retrieved from <http://www.ecojustice.ca/enviro-racism-we-have-a-problem/>

ENRICH Project (The). *The Environmental Noxiousness, Racial Inequities & Community Health Project*. A collaborative community-based research and engagement project on environmental racism in Mi’kmaq and African Nova Scotian communities. Retrieved from <http://www.enrichproject.org>

Nova Scotia Legislature. (April 2015). *Bill No. 111. Environmental Racism Prevention Act: An Act to Address Environmental Racism*. Retrieved from http://nslegislature.ca/index.php/proceedings/bills/environmental_racism_prevention_act_-_bill_111

Weinberg, A. (2010, March 27). Environmental Racism and Environmental Justice. *The Manitoban*. <http://www.themanitoban.com/2010/03/environmental-racism-and-environmental-justice/1121/>

ABOUT FEMNORTHNET

Economic development centered around resource extraction is changing northern communities in Canada socially, economically, and culturally. FemNorthNet (or the Feminist Northern Network) documented and shared the experiences of diverse, northern women affected by these changes while supporting them in their work to strengthen and build resiliency within their communities. FemNorthNet was initiated by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) and supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. This network engaged over 30 researchers and community activists across Canadian universities, colleges, and northern community organizations, with community partners in Thompson (Manitoba), Happy Valley – Goose Bay (Labrador), and Labrador West (Labrador). Learn more at www.fnn.criaw-icref.ca.

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Since 1976, the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) has been documenting the economic and social situation of women in Canada through ground-breaking feminist research. All CRIAOW activities flow from an overarching goal to provide tools to help organizations taking action to advance social justice and equality for all women.

As a non-profit organization and charity, CRIAOW's activities depend on the support of its members and donors from across Canada. All CRIAOW members receive the CRIAOW eNewsletter directly in their inbox, along with notices of new reports, policy papers, and fact sheets – like this one.

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