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## Women's Perspectives on Voisey's Bay and the Future of Economic Development in Nunatsiavut<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

On the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of July, 2015, 16 Inuit women living in Nunatsiavut, along with researchers from McMaster University<sup>2</sup> and the Nunatsiavut Government<sup>3</sup> participated in two half days of focus groups in Nain. The focus groups were open-ended discussions about: changing gender relations and community well-being in Nunatsiavut since the start of Voisey's Bay; what could be improved to ensure that people living in Nunatsiavut benefit from the mine; and what future economic development should look like. Each of the communities on the coast were represented<sup>4</sup>, as were women of different ages and experiences. The majority of the participants had had some experience at Voisey's Bay either as an employee or as spouse, parent, or relative of someone who worked at Voisey's Bay. Focus groups were jointly facilitated by Johanna Tuglavina and a university researcher alternating between one large group and two smaller break-out groups. Women participated in oral and written formats.

This report is a summary of these discussions. Themes that emerged included: increasing wealth in communities; unequal access to mining opportunities and rising economic

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<sup>4</sup> Nine participants were from Nain, three were from Hopedale, two were from Makkovik, one was from Rigolet, and one was from Postville.

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inequality; changing family dynamics within households and the persistence of poverty and food insecurity. Results are divided into two main sections. We begin by recounting women's observations about how mining has affected life in Nunatsiavut. We then present women's recommendations about how the Nunatsiavut Government, the government of Newfoundland and Labrador, and/or Vale and other institutions could improve access to mining wealth and encourage other forms of economic development.

## **Mining and Life in Nunatsiavut**

### **Increased Wealth**

Participants talked about some of the positive changes that they saw as result of the mine at Voisey's Bay. Employment opportunities resulting from the development of Voisey's Bay were one of the most visible ways that participants saw the mine changing the community. One participant said that the mine resulted in "more money in the community and less people on income support." Several women described how the flow of wealth into their communities also resulted in an increase in consumer goods such as "...more buildings, homes, and boats," and "more variety of foods in the stores..." Respondents were quick to note, however, that these benefits were primarily experienced by people who were working at the mine or who had relatives or spouses at the mine.

Women also felt that there was a general increase in the formal education attained by community members since the opening of Voisey's Bay. In the words of one participant:

There also seems to be an increase in educated Labrador Inuit, more so than before. People go out for heavy equipment training, they go out and earn university degrees or college degrees, or go to school to get some kind of trade such as millwright, or electrical, or something to do with jobs at Voisey's Bay.

This participant also felt that women in particular have benefited from increasing levels of education and training, stating: "more women are now earning a formal education and getting certified and trained in occupations that they've not sought out for before the mine at Voisey's Bay began."

Other participants noted that trust funds created from the Impacts and Benefits Agreement (IBA) funds also provided a flow of funds into communities. One participant describes:

...there is an increased availability of funding programs in the region. We have our local trust, Ulapitsaijet, that provides dollars to each Nunatsiavut community for social programs ... We have the regional trust, Tasuijatsoak Trust Fund, in which individuals and organizations can apply for monies for social programs or economic programs, all of which did not exist prior the mine of Voisey's Bay.

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Several women noted that the increase in potential funding opportunities for community programs allowed the entire community to gain some benefit from the wealth generated at Voisey's Bay.

### **Unequal Access to Mining Opportunities and Rising Inequality**

While the focus group participants identified increasing wealth in coastal communities as a positive outcome, they also felt that wealth generated by Voisey's Bay was not helping to alleviate poverty experienced by many residents of Nunatsiavut.

Even those who observed increasing wealth in coastal communities often also recognized that the increasing wealth was not generalized across the population. Many participants contrasted the increased access to jobs and wealth experienced by some with the continuing poverty experienced by others.



### *Employment*

A concern that arose from different participants several times was whether residents from the coast were benefiting equally from employment opportunities at the mine. For example, the following participant felt that the majority of Inuit hired at Voisey's Bay were from Goose Bay:

If you look at the stats it will probably still say that there's forty something percent Inuit working over there. But if you look at where are they out of, where are they really from, where do they live, it's mostly Goose Bay. You

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know, so it's not to the benefit Nunatsiavut communities like it should have been, I don't think.

Participants also referenced the adjacency principle of the IBA when expressing their frustrations concerning the lack of employment at Voisey's Bay for the residents of nearby coastal communities. One participant stated: "there are all kinds of excuses but really our IBA says if you have the qualifications and if you are from Nain or Natuashish, you should have the first job." Participants also described how not being able to access employment at the mine influenced their families:

My son can't work closer to home. He's been gone almost 9 years. And now my daughter's going through the same thing ... it's hard. You shouldn't have to send your kids all the way across Canada to get a job that they're qualified for at home. Makes me sad.

Several participants recounted different examples of people who they felt were qualified for jobs but were unable to get a job at the mine or who were laid off and not re-hired. Participants linked continuing poverty in Nain and other coastal communities to what they viewed to be limited access to employment at Voisey's Bay. Participants expressed general frustration that many in their communities continued to struggle despite the massive profits being made by the mine. One participant expressed this clearly when she said: "look at the millions of dollars that is hauled out by each boatload, and look at the poverty that's still here."

#### *Individualized Benefits*

Other participants felt that the benefits of employment were localized and did not improve the well-being of the community as a whole. For instance, some support services that are available to people working at the mine are not available to those living in coastal communities, including workers' family members. As one woman explained:

Vale did everything to support [my spouse] when he needed help, when he needed to go to rehab. But I was stuck home with the kids and I couldn't even get a babysitter to go to an AA meeting. So I had no support on my own.

#### *Rising Relative Poverty*

Participants also highlighted rising economic inequality in their communities. Those not employed at Voisey's Bay feel that they are being left behind:

I think a lot of people are struggling though. I know I'm struggling ... We can't afford to buy a lot of things now ... it's like having internet, if you don't have it then you're left out of the communication, when you've got it you're contacting the whole world.

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A concrete example of this inequality recounted by many was how rising food prices were exasperating uneven access to food. As stated by one woman, “I can see how the lower income families could have it even harder, with the prices increasing because of Voisey’s Bay in stores for food and groceries.” Some participants also described the psychological impact of this rising inequality, stating that it “lowered self-worth because some people cannot afford high price products and services.” The concept of relative poverty, poverty measured as one’s ability to maintain the average standard of living within the community, is therefore important in the case of mining development since it can increase as average income levels increase while the incomes of some remain stagnant. Another participant also used the issue of food prices to illustrate her concerns about lowering levels of self-esteem from increasing relative poverty:

The prices are so high that accessibility to healthier food items remains a concern. It's one thing to have these made available, but it's a whole [other] thing if people do not have access to it, simply because it's unaffordable to most local people in town. Imagine what that can do to someone on low income, who for the most part is buying the basics of food, flour, sugar, carnation milk, canned goods and then standing next to someone else who is purchasing all these wonderful healthy ingredients, healthy vegetables and fruit.

Other participants felt that rising inequality among individuals and families was also creating divisions in the community. One participant described:

It kind of started to divide the community too, I think, eh. Like I remember before [my spouse] started to work [at Voisey’s Bay], the people that worked in Voisey’s Bay were real lucky, luck ol’ people, and real privileged ... And now since we grew up and we’re adults now and we got our own family, [my spouse] works at Voisey’s Bay ... and we get some comments and are talked about and that, and people think we think we’re too good and all that ... We’ve even actually talked about moving away.

This participant felt resentment directed towards her from those in the community who did not have well-paying jobs after her spouse obtained employment at Voisey’s Bay.

### **Changing Relationships**

Several changes also occurred in the community following the development of Voisey’s Bay. Women discussed broad community changes that they had observed in Nunatsiavut over the past ten years. Some members attributed changes to the mine while others were less sure.

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## *Sharing*

Several women noted a decline in the level of sharing in each community. Women noted that “there is less sharing of foods than there used to be,” as well as a decline people’s willingness to help one another more generally. One woman remarked: “I find that less people help each other within the community.” Specifically, focus group members felt that people in their communities expected monetary compensation for helping each other with tasks that they previously would have done out of goodwill, such as cutting wood, or giving someone a ride in a car. As one woman in the group explained “if you want help you gotta pay for it; every little thing.” Participants felt that elders were particularly affected by the decline in sharing. As one woman said, “the younger people seem to think more of just immediate family and don't notice that elders are less fortunate people, they don't offer free help anymore, they expect to get paid.” One older participant recalled an experience like this involving her own grandson:

My grandson filled up my wood box not too long ago, and I thought he was gonna run on, and he was still lingering there, and I say: “what you waiting for?” And he said “you won’t pay me?” [Laughs]... He’s only twelve years old.

When prompted about the cause of this change in the level of generosity in the community, some participants were unsure while others felt that it was linked to Voisey’s Bay:

I: How recent is that shift, to less sharing? Is that since Voisey’s or before Voisey’s or it’s just been gradual?

P: I think it’s definitely been in the last 10 years.

I: So it was sort of associated with Voisey’s Bay?

P: Definitely.

## *Increasing Crime and Addiction*

A number of the participants mentioned that alcohol, drugs, and crime were becoming a bigger problem in their communities. For example, one participant explained that in the past she did not recall muggings being a problem, but reported that “today is it common. Today, people are afraid to walk home alone at night.” Like the issue of less generosity, it is not clear whether the perceived increase in alcohol, drugs, and crime resulted directly from the development at Voisey’s Bay or whether they were simply evidence of more general trends. For many of the participants, however, the rising inequality and uneven distribution of benefits resulting from the mine appear to be a main reason for these negative community level changes.

## *Increased Isolation*

Finally, some participants identified a growing sense that communities on the coast were isolated from the larger centre of Goose Bay and from the mine, despite their proximity to

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Voisey's Bay. For example some participants felt that over the past ten years there has been less and less information and communication on the coast about the project. Several respondents felt that when the company closed their office in Nain, the flow of information to the community declined. Other women felt that the link between Nain and Voisey's Bay was not as strong as it should be because many mine workers from the coast had moved to Goose Bay after getting their jobs so that they would have more convenient travel to and from the mine. Relocation was attributed to the strict fly-in/out work arrangements that did not allow workers to organize their own travel between Voisey's Bay and their home communities.

### **Voisey's Bay Families**

Since many respondents had a family member working at the mine or had worked at the mine themselves, many people recounted how mining employment influenced themselves and their families. There was agreement that working at the mine tended to increase the confidence of male employees. It was suspected that full time employment at the mine increased their sense of security and worth as a provider. Descriptions of how working at Voisey's Bay influenced other aspects of families and relationships were more ambiguous because of peoples' varying experiences

### **Impact on Relationships and Gender Roles**

#### *Fly-in, fly-out*

Participants who had either worked at the mine or who had a spouse who worked there felt that their lives were structured by the fly -in/out and bi-weekly shift rotations. Several participants felt the net effect of these regular separations was positive. One participant suggested that "it's healthy for the relationships if you're not together all the time." Similarly, one participant wrote that the time apart helped her relationship with her spouse, stating that the time apart "makes us closer when [he is] home, [our] love gets stronger and [we spend] more quality time together."

Other participants, however, felt that being away from their spouse or partner for two weeks at a time had a negative impact on their relationships. For some the time away lead to trust issues, with one participant remarking that "[the fly in/out work arrangement] is a real breeding ground for jealousy..." Others were concerned about time spent with children. As described by one woman:

My spouse works in Voiseys' Bay two weeks in two weeks out, and he's been working there ever since our kids were babies, and I can't really complain about it to him, because it's his job and it's how he supports his family, but it's so sad to me to have him miss out on half their childhoods and half their lives and half our lives together.

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For others still, having a spouse who worked at Voiey's Bay resulted in a change in the division of tasks at home. Women described feeling resentment at taking care of all of the household tasks. One participant explained: "just because they just comes home from work, they think they don't have to do anything at home."



### *Independence of Women*

Participants also felt that having a spouse who worked at Voiey's Bay forced them to become more independent. This meant taking on tasks regardless of gendered expectations, such as "shovelling [and] changing spark plugs," as well as stereotypically feminine tasks like "cooking and cleaning." While some women described this as a burden others felt that it was a positive consequence of being without their partners for extended periods. As one woman stated: "...one positive aspect for women is they become more independent, and that's a good thing."

Some women drew parallels between the blurring of gendered tasks when a partner was away and the fluid gender roles that existed traditionally for Inuit when participating in harvesting activities:

Hunting, fishing, and trapping, wildlife resources, resources of the sea, you know the kind of existence we had for generations and generations. They co-shared that responsibility living a simple life like that.

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From this perspective, fluidity in gendered tasks was not a new feature of family life in the region, but was instead similar to the fluid division of labour that existed between men and women when engaging in subsistence harvest.

### **Time on the Land**

Participants also felt that working at Voisey's Bay influenced the amount of time that families spent out on the land hunting, fishing, and harvesting. How time on the land had changed, however, was contradictory. Several participants felt that working at Voisey's Bay allowed women from Voisey's Bay families to spend more time on the land since it provided cash needed to participate in harvesting. Others, however, felt that women were experiencing a "loss of interests in hunting and fishing," and that both men and women were spending less time on the land. One participant attributed to this to the increased time constraints faced by workers:

[Workers] thought they'd have more opportunity to go on the land, because they had more money for gas, they had more money to buy a reliable machine and stuff like that, but I don't think that's really the case. You would have to make it a priority to go and do that ... Generally everybody in Rigolet is going out less, to be honest with you.

Rather than having a universally positive or negative effect, there were both costs and benefits to gaining employment at the mine. This is noted by one participant who stated: "it's a choice you have to make on your own. If you want that money, that kind of security, or if you want your happiness and family. So it's your personal choice." As this participant succinctly captures, although employment at the mine brings an improved income, it also has the potential to reduce time with family and on the land.

### **Recommendations**

Focus group participants made several recommendations about how to increase the benefits that flow from Voisey's Bay to their communities. A key focus was how to increase local residents' access to employment and how to support communities as a whole, including those who were not benefiting from mining employment.

### **Access to Jobs**

Access to work at the mine was the main focus of the discussion about what people wanted for their future. To counter barriers that people on the coast faced applying for work at the mine, the women suggested that there be a paid job application coordinator to serve their communities. As one participant explained, the centralized on-line application process that Vale implemented after taking over the firm is a barrier because "lots of people don't have internet access or a computer." The proposed employment facilitator could not only help with submitting applications, but also with completing applications, resume writing, and job searching more generally.

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Other participants, who recalled a Voisey's Bay Nickel Company office that existed in Nain in the early years of the project, suggested that Vale open a similar office on the coast that would both help with employment recruitment and improve communication between the company and the communities. One woman had positive memories of the earlier office:

Voisey's Bay had an office here in Nain and it was welcoming to everyone, it was a nice office like an out of town one. We could drop off our resumes and get feedback from the mine here for the community. There is nothing like that now.

Several women felt that a designated employment facilitator and a local Vale office in Nain would go a long way to easing access of local community members to jobs at Voisey's Bay.

Others, however, did not think that these solutions would address what they felt was the real barrier to employment on the coast: the unwillingness of employers to follow hiring provisions in the IBA. One participant indicated her lack of trust in the hiring process stating that "[Vale] wouldn't look at [resumes] anyway even if you sent them." To address these feelings of mistrust and give community members another mechanism for lodging complaints about unfair hiring practices, one participant felt "strongly ... that there should be an ombudsman to enforce the IBA, the EIS, [and] government policy." According to some this would be of particular use in relation to employment. One participant illustrated the point with a scenario: "If [someone's] daughter couldn't get a job she should be able to have someone to go and voice those concerns to and then investigate why she couldn't."

### **Improved Support for Families and Communities**

Focus group discussions also addressed different ways to provide support for families and communities. Women felt that childcare was a need regardless of whether women or men were seeking work at the mine:

We have childcare concerns, like there's a lot of young mothers who start making families early and then they don't get educated they don't get trained they're just home being ... super moms. Even for me, I got a pretty good paying job, I'm stuck for childcare still. That would scare a lot of people away. People would be like: "I can't go to work because I can't get childcare and there's no available childcare."

Many of the participants felt that access to child care was necessary for women to participate more fully in community life and so that they did not "feel trapped in their homes" while their spouses were on-shift.



Several women felt that it would be good to provide opportunities to facilitate women's participation in community life and leadership. One woman wanted to see more women in leadership in the government stating that in "the Assembly, there's 17 members and only 5 of them are women."

Another woman alternatively suggested that money from the IBA be used to promote economic initiatives of individuals in each community: "it would be great if we could use some of the royalties and benefits from the mine site to accommodate [the] economic endeavours [of] local people who may need help with start-up costs to start their own businesses." This could be funding available for small scale projects based around subsistence like "if a woman was wanting to create her own resource to benefit herself or her family [with] ... a vegetable garden, or sell berries, or do a bakery, and all kinds of stuff you can do from off the land," to more sophisticated enterprises like restaurants.

Food security was another issue often raised by the focus groups, as the women feel that there are not enough options for quality and affordable food in town. To address this concern participants argued that royalties could be used to help set up community greenhouses "so that people could grow their own vegetable instead of buying the expensive vegetables from outside." Other suggestions included a community maintenance position to help people in need in the case of crisis (such as a failed furnace in winter) and to subsidize the construction of new homes to relieve the effects of an ongoing housing crisis.

### **Future of Resource Development in Nunatsiavut**

When discussing the future of resource development in Nunatsiavut, employment was once again a central focus. Participants felt that a more proactive and comprehensive

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approach to training was needed to ensure local community members would be qualified for potential jobs. As one participant implored:

We need to push harder to get more people educated and prepare for opportunities that could arise down the road. We need to get stakeholders talking together and discussing ways in which ... communities, companies, and governments and ultimately how everyone can receive maximum benefits from resource development.

A specific example of where a proactive approach could be applied was concerned with the upcoming underground phase of the Voisey's Bay mine. In this case, participants felt that their communities needed to be preparing potential workers for those opportunities now:

They're going to go underground in a couple of years; we should be working really hard now so that we can fill the positions that need to be filled with our own people ... so we should be taking the bull by the horns now and ... we should be getting training programs now for some of [the potential new positions].

Finally, participants felt that in the future, new IBAs should be stronger and better designed to more effectively help communities deal with potential issues arising from resource development such as those mentioned in this report.

Although the majority of participants did support future resource development, their support was conditional. Women only wanted future resource development if the benefits and opportunities for community members were greater and if the social and environmental costs were lower than they had been with Voisey's Bay. For many participants, the solution is to negotiate IBAs that are stronger and more easily and closely enforced. This sentiment was summarized by one woman who stated: "It's okay to have another resource as long as we know that our security is going to be backed up by our IBA." This opinion is echoed by another participant who would support future resource development "...only IF IBA's are implemented and enforced, and there are guaranteed benefits to ensure that Labrador Inuit benefit where ever they can benefit."

