Position paper for the 5th NRF open Assembly, September 24th – 27th 2008

Measuring Inuit Community Well-Being:

The Canadian Inuit Community Well-Being Index

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June 20, 2008

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1. Introduction[1]

Much emphasis has recently been put on examining the living conditions existing within Canada's Aboriginal communities. Of particular interest is the research challenge to produce a measure of the well-being of populations residing within such communities. This article begins to address this issue by examining Canadian Inuit communities in relation Other Canadian communities through the application of the Community Well-Being Index (CWB). This measure, developed by researchers associated with the Strategic Research and Analysis Directorate (SRAD) at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has previously been used to measure and compare the well-being of First Nations in Canada with that of other Canadian Communities and has also been applied to assess disparities over time. (McHardy & O'Sullivan 2004; O'Sullivan & McHardy, 2004)[2]

2. Inuit population and Inuit communities in Canada

Of the 976,305 individuals who identified themselves as Aboriginal[3] in the 2001 Census, about 5%, or 45,070, reported that they were Inuit (Statistics Canada 2003). The majority (83%) of Inuit are living in communities situated in the Canadian Arctic. About half of the population lives in Nunavut, while Quebec's northern portion (Nunavik) is home to 19%, the north coastal and south-eastern areas of Labrador and the Inuvialuit Region in the northwest corner of the Northwest Territories are home to most of the remainder of the Inuit population with 7% in each of these regions (Health Canada, 2004).

The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) is the national Inuit organization in Canada, representing the four Inuit regions located in two provinces and two territories – Nunatsiavut (Labrador), Nunavik (northern Quebec), Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit region in the Northwest Territories[4]. ITK represents the interest of those Inuit living in one of the 53 communities dispersed throughout these regions: 6 in Labrador, 14 in Nunavik, 27 in Nunavut and 6 in the Northwest Territories.

This articles focuses on 51[5] of these communities representing all of those with a population size large enough to allow analysis (i.e. larger than 65). These 51 communities

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[1] This paper is a condensed version of: Senécal, S., O'Sullivan, E., Guimond, E., & Uppal, S. (*2007*) **Error! Main Document Only.**Applying the Community Well-Being Index and the Human Development Index to Inuit in Canada. In J. White, D. Beavon, & N. Spence (Eds). Aboriginal Well-Being. Toronto: Thompson Educational Press. 149-172. It focuses specifically on community level measures of well-being.

[2] Readers are encouraged to visit the following link for more details on research associated with well-being: http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/ra/index_e.html

[3] In the Census, the Aboriginal identity population refers to those persons who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group, i.e. North American Indian, Métis or Inuit (Eskimo), and/or those who reported being a Treaty Indian or a Registered Indian as defined by the Indian Act of Canada and/or who were members of an Indian Band or First Nation.

[4] For more information on ITK, visit: www.itk.ca. Additionally and for more information on the history and current situation on Inuit communities, see ITK, 2003.

[5] 2 communities from the Kitikmeot region of Nunavut (Bathurst Inlet and Umingmaktok) which are identified by ITK as Inuit communities were excluded from the analysis as their population was under the threshold of 65 used in this study. The case of Happy-Valley-Goose Bay is worth discussing in more details. While it is technically not within the boundaries of the Nunatsiavut land claim settlement, a large

have an average size of 1021 inhabitants, but it should be noted that they present variations in size with the largest showing a population of 7969 in 2001 compared to the smallest at 114. A few of these communities have road access to southern points, or neighboring villages but the vast majority of Inuit communities are accessible by air only which impacts access to goods and services and cost of living. For most communities, a large majority of the population is of Inuit.

3. The Community Well-Being (CWB) Index

The Community Well-Being (CWB) Index is a means of examining the relative well-being of communities in Canada. It was initially developed in response to the growing concern over the socio-economic conditions that exist among Canada's Aboriginal populations. It is essentially an extension of the United Nations methodology for calculating the Human Development Index of populations[6] which has been previously applied to the Registered Indian population of Canada (Cooke, Beavon, & McHardy, 2004) and to Inuit inhabited areas of Canada (Senécal,

The CWB index combines several key indicators of socio-economic well-being into a single "CWB score". A score is generated for each community in Canada, allowing an "at-a-glance" look at the relative well-being of those communities. CWB scores range from 0 to 1 (with one being the highest). Scores reflect the entire population of a community, regardless of their ethnicity and/or cultural background of its inhabitants[7].

Additional information pertaining to the methodology of the CWB index is available in McHardy and O'Sullivan (2004). While that report also provides a lengthy discussion of the limitations of the CWB model, the main issues should be highlighted here. First, the CWB focuses primarily on the socio-economic aspects of well-being. Limitations of the Canadian Census prevented the incorporation into the model of equally important aspects of well-being such as physical, psychological and cultural well-being. It is also important to note that the socio-economic indicators of which the index is comprised may not capture fully the reality of the economic situation in Inuit Communities. Many Inuit are still heavily involved in traditional economic pursuits, which, although contributing to their material well-being, are not manifested directly in monetary income or paid employment (Usher, Duhaime, & Searles, 2003).

The CWB index consists of the following four equally weighted components measuring:

1) **Income per capita** as a proxy for access to goods and services;
2) **Educational attainment** as a proxy for literacy and knowledge;
3) **Labour force status** (labour force participation and employment rate); and
4) **Housing quantity and quality** (crowding and dwelling condition)

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portion of its residents are Inuit. Through discussions with ITK and with the Labrador Inuit Association, it was decided to include Happy Valley-Goose Bay in the list of Labrador Inuit communities.

[6] See http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/indices/hdi/ for more details on the United Nations index.

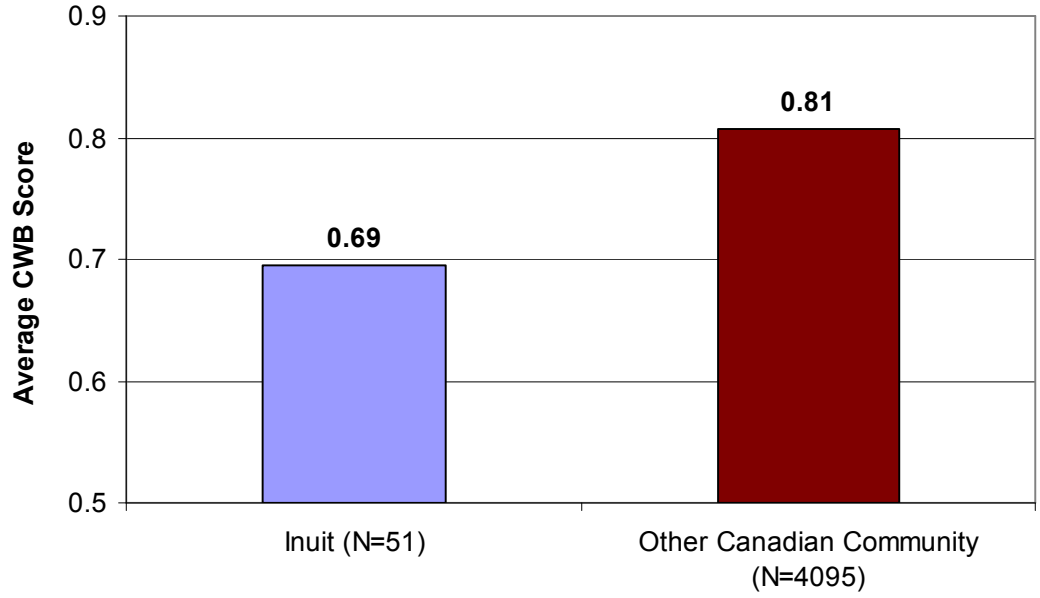
[7] Inuit communities are to a large degree inhabited by individuals of Inuit ancestry and/or identity. In this analysis, only four communities had less than 75% of their population not identifying as Inuit.

4. Results

Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference. indicates that the average CWB score for Inuit communities is much lower that the average score for Other Canadian communities[8]. This initial finding points to the overall lower level of well-being in Inuit communities when compared to other Canadian communities.

Figure 1

Average Community Well-Being Score by Community Type, 2001



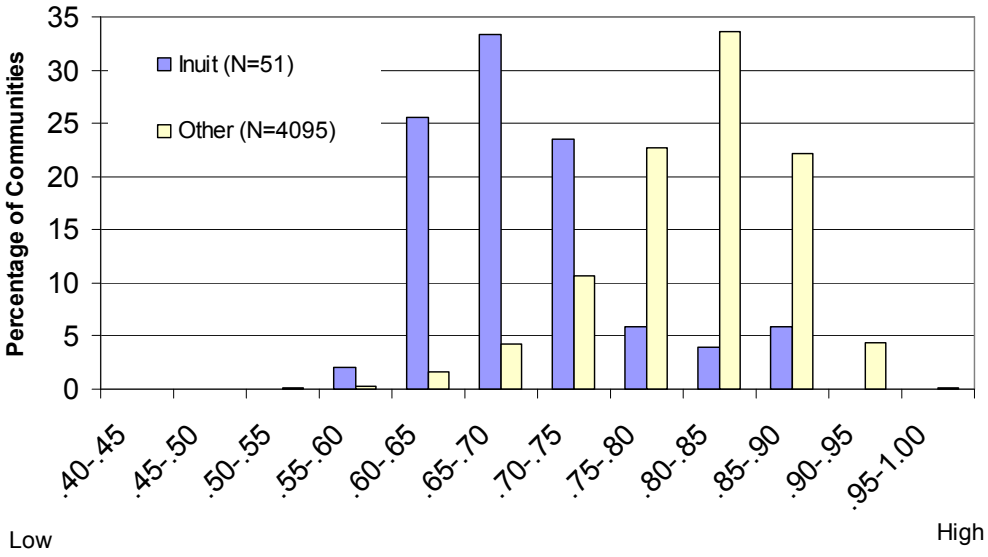
Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census

Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference. further illustrates the clear disparities between Inuit and Other Canadian Communities. While Inuit communities are typically distributed towards the middle point of the CWB range when compared with Other Canadian communities, further reinforcing the statement that lower well-being is typically observed for Inuit communities. It is also worth mentioning that Inuit communities are showing significant disparities in their levels of well-being with scores ranging quite a bit across the CWB scale from the lowest to the highest scoring communities. The disparity between communities can also be assessed by looking at the map included in appendix A.

[8] In the context of this article, First Nations communities of which there are 539 in the CWB database are excluded from Other Canadian communities.

Figure 2

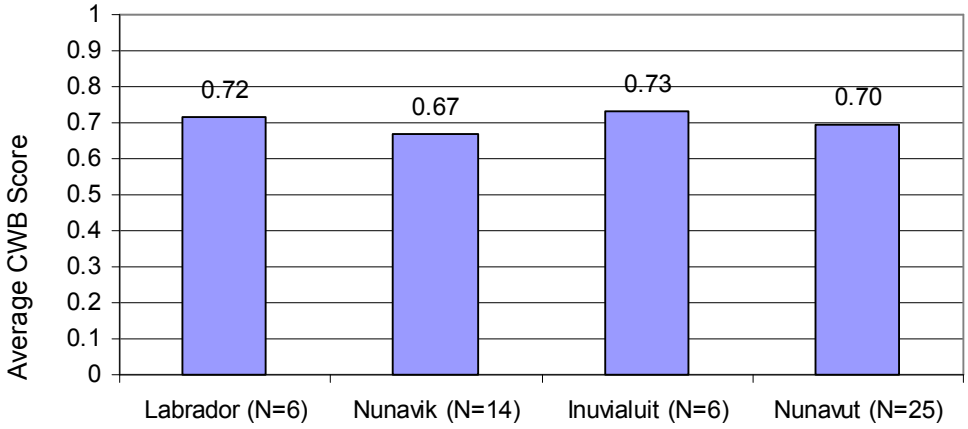
Distribution of Inuit and Other Canadian Communities by Community Well-Being Score, 2001



Inuit communities can vary in terms of well-being across regions. As such, looking at the national picture may in fact hide such interregional variations. Figure 3 presents average CWB scores for Inuit communities by region. It can be seen that Nunavik presents the lowest average CWB when compared to other regions.

Figure 3

Average Community Well-Being score by Inuit region, 2001



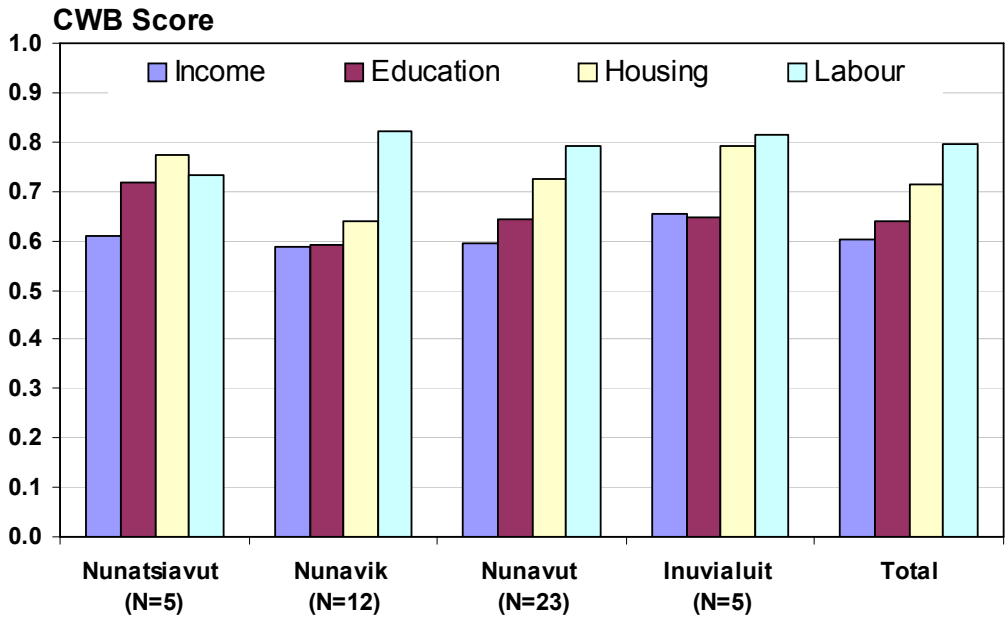
Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census

As variations are outlined between Inuit regions on the overall CWB score, it is interesting to assess which components of the CWB may be responsible for the overall observed differences.

Figure 4 shows that while all components show some variations from region to region, education and housing are the two components for which the larger variations are observed. For both of these components, lowest scores are observed in Nunavik which explains the overall lower scores obtained by that region. It is worth mentioning that on the other hand, Nunavik shows the highest level of the labour component of the CWB. Another interesting element is observed for the Nunatsiavut communities which show the highest level of the education component while also presenting the lowest labour characteristics. This last finding highlights the specific economic and labour market characteristics of this region in contrast to other Inuit regions.

Figure 4

Community Well-Being Average Component Scores by Inuit Region, 2001



The evolution of the CWB score in Inuit communities between 1991 and 2001 is presented in

Table 1. It can be seen that while scores have progressed during that period, much of the growth has been observed between 1991 and 1996. This finding mirrors what has been previously found for First Nations (O'Sullivan & McHardy, 2004).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the CWB Index Across Time for Inuit Communities (N=51)

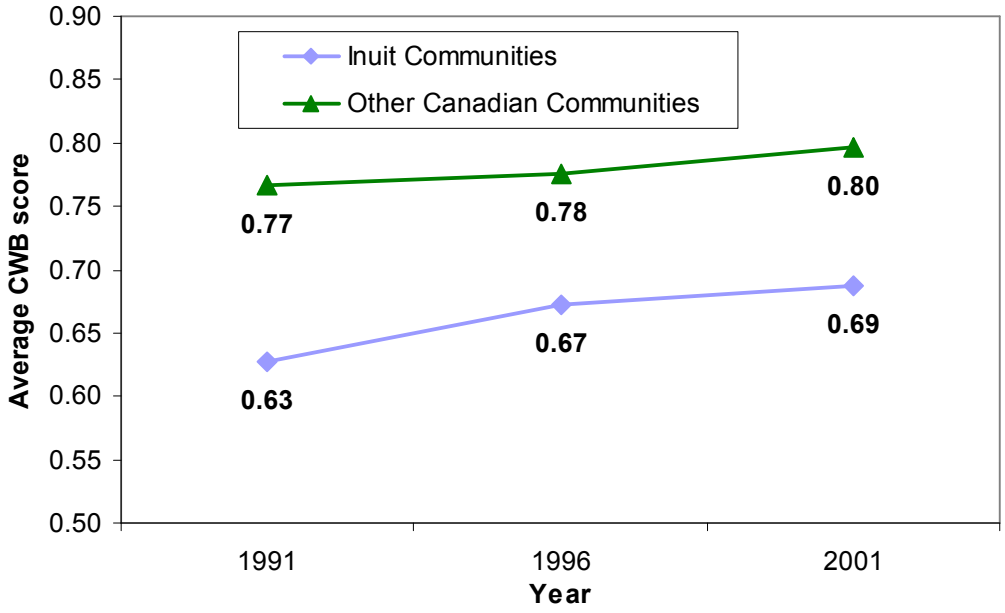
Census Year	Minimum CWB Score	Maximum CWB Score	Average CWB Score	Standard Deviation
1991	0.50	0.85	0.63	0.078
1996	0.58	0.84	0.67	0.069
2001	0.57	0.87	0.69	0.068

Source: Special calculations based on the 2001 Census

The increase of well-being of Inuit communities and Other Canadian communities is further compared in Figure 5 which shows a closure of the gap in the first interval (1991-1996) followed by a somewhat more static gap in the subsequent intercensal period (1996-2001).

Figure 5

CWB Average Scores by Community Type, 1991-2001



5. Conclusion/Discussion

The Community Well-Being index is a step towards a deeper understanding of the socioeconomic conditions in Inuit communities and of their well-being relative to the broader Canadian population. The descriptive statistics contained herein illustrate clearly the marked disparity in socio-economic well-being between Inuit communities and other Canadian communities. These statistics also highlight the great disparities that exist between Inuit communities and show that some communities are enjoying fairly high levels of well-being while others are still faced with more difficulties.

While this report highlights the relative well-being of Inuit communities, it should be kept in mind that these Inuit communities present some key characteristics that can influence such direct comparison. First and foremost, Inuit communities are located very far from urban centers, in isolated northern locations. This is associated with high costs, especially when it comes to goods which have to be «imported» from southern locations. As such, high cost of living probably has an impact on income which is incidentally the lowest component score in Inuit communities. On the other hand, a widely acknowledge traditional economy still exists in many communities (Usher, Duhaime, & Searles, 2003) which may contribute to soften the impact of cost of living on overall well-being.

Results from the initial CWB analysis should not be perceived as posing a final «diagnostic» on Inuit communities. Several factors which may play a key role in the well-being of individual inhabitants of Inuit communities are not discussed here. As such, the analysis provided here can serve as a starting point in assessing issues associated with well-being. Further analysis aimed at causes and correlates of community well-being are required. Elements such as the cultural composition of communities in terms of Inuit versus other cultural/ethnic identities, isolation, size and the like would refine our understanding of the relative well-being of Inuit communities.

Despite inherent limitations, this project contributes to the body of knowledge available on the well-being of Inuit. Limitations in data availability and the tendency of numerous research programs to be focused solely on First Nations population have in the past contributed to the lack of public awareness on key issues associated with Inuit well-being. It is hoped that the focus of research such as the one presented here can elicit the interest of stakeholders within the policy research area so that a clearer picture can emerge. Along those lines, improvements of available data sources on Inuit are seen as one of the key in helping researchers and stakeholders in their quest for knowledge.

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Appendix A

Map 1 - Levels of Well-Being in Inuit Communities