

## C05-O05

### **MINE CLOSURE, LOCAL WELL-BEING AND CARIBOU LIVELIHOODS: WHAT PATHWAYS TO SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE IN MINE-IMPACTED INUIT COMMUNITIES?**

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Our presentation will address the implications of mine closure on local well-being in the Inuit community of Qamani'tuaq, Nunavut. Mining development in the Arctic is commonly presented as a generator of employment and development in Canada's isolated north. However, the scenario "mine closure" is little emphasized in IBA (*Inuit Benefit Agreement*) contracts and remains understudied in the academic literature. There is a recognized need to explore future mining scenarios from an Inuit perspective and identify the conditions for community resilience after mining.

In response to locally defined research questions, we investigated the potential impacts of mine closure at Qamani'tuaq, with a focus on caribou futures. We utilized a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework, adapted to an Inuit context and analyzed our results using Socio-Ecological Resilience (SER) theory. An inland Inuit community traditionally dependent on caribou hunting and fishing, Qamani'tuaq has been affected since 2007 by a gold mine, operated by the company Agnico Eagle. The mine has transformed local socio-ecological dynamics and also raised concerns over the negative socio-economic impacts. Mine closure in 2017 may once again signify major changes and needs for adaptation.

Participants defined five key criteria for local "well-being": Family Life, Jobs and Income, Food Independence, Health and Well-Being, and Learning. These were then used to evaluate quantitatively and qualitatively the range of potential impacts of mine closure. Our results show that the closure of the Meadowbank mine could not only cause job losses but also generate "domino effects" in all five aspects of local well-being. In a "worst case" scenario, mine closure could occasion job losses that place new stresses on families. In a "best case scenario", mine closure is envisioned to occasion a recovery of the land, a return of the caribou herds that have been far from town, and an opportunity to explore new businesses and development paths.

We also studied the factors contributing to community resilience (the ability to maintain well-being) after mine closure. Participants hoped for adequate job transfer opportunities for mine workers. Yet they also underlined as fundamental to resilience the existence of social supports, essential infrastructures and services. Mine corporate social investments (CSI) could make a contribution in this area. Agnico Eagle demonstrates a great openness to reflect on possible strategies to boost resilience.

At the level of cultural and food system resilience, the conservation of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) emerged as fundamental. Areva's current proposal to begin uranium extraction in the calving grounds of the Beverly caribou herd therefore falls into serious question, as it threatens to undermine subsistence livelihoods and the resources foundational to community resilience.

The potentially widespread socio-economic consequences of mine closure (and future uranium projects) pose an important point for reflection on the limits of corporate social responsibility. To what degree do mining companies have a responsibility to prevent or compensate for changes in a socio-ecological system changes that are indirectly caused by their activities? We will open up a critical discussion of this and other questions linked to long-term mining impacts and caribou livelihoods.