



Pan-Canadian Community Development Learning Network Profile of Effective Practice:

Central Labrador Economic Development Board

Context

The Central Labrador Economic Development Board (CLEDB) is located in Happy Valley - Goose Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador. Labrador is big land, in fact, the CLEDB serves economic zone 3, consisting of four communities inside a big geographic area – 70,000 square kilometres. In the context of the province, this zone represents 17% of the landmass and only 2% of the population.

It is a land characterized by wilderness and small communities settled for the good hunting, fishing and trapping grounds. In North West River, a settler community of five hundred, the

This Profile of Effective Practice is one of fifteen stories examining how innovative, community-based initiatives are using comprehensive approaches to improve social and economic conditions on a local level.

The profiles were prepared as part of a 2.5-year project of the Canadian CED Network looking at the links between social inclusion and community economic development.

For other profiles, more information on the project and additional resources on social inclusion and CED, see the notes at the end of this document.

Hudson Bay trading post sits as a museum and symbol of the profound impact that company had on the region. In the Innu community of Sheshatshiu, many of the 1,200 people still spend several months each year in the wilderness living off the land, with elders handing down to children the ways of their ancestors. Besides having a school, a clinic and some business, Sheshatshiu, has a youth treatment centre, testament to an ongoing struggle for identity. Mud Lake is the smallest and most isolated community in the region, with sixty settler descendents.

In contrast, Happy Valley-Goose Bay is the largest centre in Labrador and is the government hub for the region, with a regional hospital, school board, schools, college, and military base. The military base is the primary employer and the reason for Happy Valley-Goose Bay's creation in 1943. The town has a population of 7,969, and in spite of its isolation is the

fourth wealthiest in Newfoundland. The economy of Happy Valley-Goose Bay has always been based on earned wages, but like the other smaller communities, many residents with Innu, Inuit, Métis and settler heritage still live "off the land."

A small manufacturing sector is developing in Central Labrador, along with a few small agricultural initiatives in the past 10 years. Big hopes for employment ride on the Voisey's Bay Nickel mega-project in northern Labrador, the future development of the hydro potential in the Lower Churchill, and the completion of the Trans-Labrador Highway Project. Prospective employment from these projects are considered against their impact on the Innu culture and the environment.

History

The Central Labrador Economic Development Board is one of 20 Economic Development Boards set up in 1996 in each of the economic development zones of Newfoundland and Labrador. The CLEDB mission is "to create self-sustaining economic communities which will strengthen the ability to produce and export goods and services. We appreciate our cultural diversity, and strive for equal opportunity, and the preserving of our pristine environment and community lifestyle." Because of the overwhelming influence of the military base, the Board of Directors of CLEDB made a conscious decision to work on developing other opportunities that were not tied to the military, against the prevailing wisdom of the business community. At this early time there was an acceptance by government funders (ACOA, HRDC) that there was a strong link between social and economic issues. As a result, the CLEDB was involved with some activities that might be considered social projects with an economic twist, like a Fall Fair and literacy programs.

Activities

The federal and provincial governments established five core functions for each zone's regional economic development board: develop and coordinate the implementation of the zone's strategic economic plans; coordinate business development support; provide support to organizations and communities for development activities consistent with the strategic economic plan; coordinate social and economic initiatives relating to regional economic development; and promote public participation and community education related to regional economic development.

Within these functions clearly mixing social and economic outcomes, the CLEDB has had a great deal of autonomy, and has been involved in the following activities:

Central Labrador, Newfoundland and Labrador

Location – The region of Central Labrador covers 70,000 square kilometres. In the context of the province, this area represents 17% of the landmass and only 2% of the population.

History – The Innu have lived seasonally in this area to fish and trap for centuries. European or settler communities sprouted up in the 1700s for the same reasons, bringing the Hudson's Bay Company and other companies to exploit the bountiful resources.

Economy – The economy is based primarily on the military, with a growing presence from Voisey Bay Nickel and Lower Churchill. Many people continue to supplement income with trapping, fishing, and logging.

Social Need – For the settler community it is the effects of isolation, and being a one-industry town. For the Innu it is the dominance of the settler community, with its dislocation of traditional living and cultural identity – most dramatically affecting Innu youth.

Claim to fame – The region is an alternate landing site for the space shuttle. The Innu community of Sheshatshiu has the highest suicide rates in North America.

Capacity Building with Organizations:

- Bring together like minded groups to network and sometimes incorporate the group, then help them with proposals and advocacy on issues such as agribusiness.

Career and Entrepreneurship Support:

- Big Land fair
- Coordination and delivery of Junior Achievement
- Youth Employment Strategy (YES)
- Help with literacy projects
- Provide telephone, fax and communication services to groups and entrepreneurs that require a cost-effective service.

Research on Economic Opportunities:

- Especially because the government is looking at evidenced-based development.
- Feasibility of Mealy Mountain National Park and employment skills requirements
- Agricultural opportunities
- On post-secondary institutions and their impact

Coordination of Discussion Forums:

- Part of public participation. Critical for bringing new ideas in to and from the communities.
- On future developments and direction, i.e. Voisey Bay mining and employee issues and, the Churchill Falls II development.

The most innovative activity by far that the CLEDB has developed has been the Big Land Fair which as Carol Best, the Executive Director says, “was inspired through failure.” Before the Big Land Fair, the CLEDB and partner groups, in their promotion of Canada Career Week, went to the schools, colleges and community organizations to promote training and entrepreneurship. It was a lot of work, but the take-up was low. At public events hosted by community organizations, they might attract 25 people. Then one of the original members suggested they organize a fall fair to attract people and then imbed the Canada Career Week elements inside it. Today, anywhere between 2,000 and 4,000 people from the region attend the Big Land Fair. Besides being a venue to hand out pamphlets on training and entrepreneurship, the Fair provides the opportunity for people to try being an entrepreneur. As a result of the displays offered and competitions organized, many people are discovering entrepreneurship on their own, bringing jams, traditional clothing, and new ideas forward. It has provided a place to learn about each other’s heritage in an informal setting, and it has brought groups together formally to work at creating something fun. The organizers include the CLEDB, the Labrador Friendship Centre, the Youth Career Development Centre, the College, the Lake Melville Community Employment Centre (works with people with disabilities), and the Department of Agriculture.

In 2004, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador awarded the Big Land Fair the Innovation in Education Award that recognizes exceptional efforts and achievements in bringing together education and community economic development for the betterment of communities.

Participatory and Comprehensive Analysis

All economic development boards originally had a great deal of freedom to mix both social and economic development activities and objectives. For the CLEDB, this has meant using cultural

activities to promote economic development. It is reflected in their work at bridging cultures, specifically between settler and first nation communities, and in bridging four distinct geographic areas. And it is reflected in their desire to be less dependent on a single industry – the military. This has led the CLEDB to get involved promoting a SMART community and is reflected in their effort to have a diverse Board. The Board designates seats for: the four municipalities; the tourism industry; the cultural industry; the Chamber of Commerce; the formal education institutions including the college, university and school board; women in business; Lake Melville Community Employment (opportunities for people with disabilities); the military base; the Inuit Association; the Innu Development Corporation; the Métis Development Corporation; and youth.

Comprehensive Analysis

The approach used at the CLEDB is as an enabler-facilitator. They facilitate social and economic activities that bridge culture and reduce dependence. High priority is placed on joint ventures, and on building a SMART community.

Outcomes and Evaluation

The CLEDB does not use an evaluation framework to measure outcomes from its own work. It does not start enterprises but facilitates partnering between other groups in order to create an environment for opportunity to grow.

However, if we look at the Big Land Fair, we see that it had a remarkable effect on bringing cultures and communities together. Where there was no such fair or major cross-cultural activity there is one now, which has had a significant impact on community capacity building. The Fair has spun off new businesses as a result of individuals trying different ideas out – jams, aboriginal clothing, and tourism. It has also recruited more people into the training stream, something the conventional methods had failed at in the past. Because each booth holder in the Fair must sign up at the CLEDB office, the CLEDB becomes very connected to the community, creating an opportunity for exchange and learning at both ends.

Part of the success that the CLEDB has helped facilitate is the continued growth and development of the three aboriginal development groups, the Métis, Innu, and Inuit. Much of this has come from promoting joint ventures, such as the Big Land Fair.

Success Factors, Policies and Lessons

Originally, when the CLEDB was set-up, they had a great deal of autonomy to develop or partner on community-based programs that mixed social and economic development objectives. The Big Land Fair is a great example of that mix.

ACOA now wants the economic development boards to focus on “economic” development. Carol Best, the Executive Director at the CLEDB says, “I don’t know why it (social) is being taken out but it will make my life easier.”

What has not made life easy is a budget that has been unchanged since 1997. The CLEDB survives on 2.5 staff (though recently, a new contract boosted that to 3). “We have also lost the flexibility of HRDC”, Carol adds. In the past, the CLEDB could add project-based staff and coordinating staff for seasonally-based activities and associations. Now the HRDC programs are much more restrictive making it impossible to boost staffing on innovative projects. Another

cutback was on travel and conferences, which means less sharing and developing ideas with colleagues across the country.

Success Factors

- Maintaining an enabler role not an owner role.
- Listening to the community and developing the community's ideas.
- And remaining positive and smiling when things get tough!

The CLEDB and region were really moving forward on the SMART communities' project. Having a pilot project on video conferencing was great for developing projects and ideas, and for bridging communities. However, the satellite feed cost proved exorbitant, and so the project was cancelled. The hope is that with broadband it may be a go again.

Major success factors include: remaining non-traditional; being an enabler rather than an owner; being youth-focused; and inspiring joint ventures or opportunities for cross-cultural activity.

The Executive Director, Carol Best, suggests a few lessons she has learned. "One, government moves slowly. Two, projects require a minimum 5 years to develop and bear fruit. And three, you must keep positive at all times -- when times get tough you smile even harder."

The CLEDB at the outset used to spend a lot of money on promoting their ideas. But Carol says they learned through mistakes that the best thing to do is to serve the ideas that are generated by the community – businesses and partners.

Seth Asimakos

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More information on the Central Labrador Economic Development Board can be found on their website at: <http://www.central-labrador.nf.ca/>

Resources

Newfoundland and Labrador Community Accounts - <http://www.communityaccounts.ca/>

Regional Economic Development Boards Community Capacity Building Modules
<http://www.cedresources.ca/index.php>

More Profiles of Effective Practice and other resources on social inclusion are available at: <http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/pages/learningnetwork.asp>

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