



Social Enterprises
Knowledgeable Economies
and Sustainable Communities

Community Resilience, Adaptation, and Innovation

The Case of the Social Economy in La Ronge

Kimberly Brown
Isobel M. Findlay
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**A research report prepared for the Northern Ontario, Manitoba,
and Saskatchewan Regional Node of the Social Economy Suite**

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Entreprises sociales
économies intelligentes
et communautés durables



COMMUNITY RESILIENCE,
ADAPTATION, AND INNOVATION

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ABSTRACT

IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND the similarities, differences, and contributions of the social economy in urban, rural, and northern contexts so that communities across Saskatchewan can take full advantage of the social economy's unique ability to address critical economic, social, and cultural issues. However, because development is often framed as either urban or rural, there remains too little understanding of the social economy — including co-operatives, mutuals, not-for-profits, and voluntary sector organizations associated with alternative development models, people before profits, and democratic participation — in the northern context. This case study on the social economy in the northern Saskatchewan community of La Ronge has three key objectives: to identify social economy actors in La Ronge; to document the economic, social, and cultural contributions of the social economy to the community; and to highlight the opportunities and challenges facing the social economy in La Ronge. Data was collected from secondary sources, direct observation, and twelve face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with key participants from leading social economy organizations in La Ronge.

This study found that the social economy in La Ronge has made significant contributions to the economic, social, and cultural health of the community by mitigating the effects of economic leakage, skills shortages, as well as race, class, and gender divisions. The community has achieved this through individual organizational action or through the development of partnerships with other social economy organizations and/or the public and private sectors. Nevertheless, social economy organizations in La Ronge face a number of challenges that frustrate their efforts to do more, including administrative and jurisdictional boundaries; poor communication between or among organizations; a misunderstanding of the social economy among politicians, policy-makers, and the public; and a lack of financial and human resources. Despite these challenges, the social economy in La Ronge has been, and continues to be, a source of community resilience and innovation in a community faced with both incredible opportunities and hardships. Social economy organizations survive because of their relevance to the community and their capacity to meet real economic, social, and cultural needs.

INTRODUCTION

THIS CASE STUDY is a survey of the social economy in the northern community of La Ronge, Saskatchewan. The first objective of this research project is to identify social economy actors in La Ronge, including co-operatives, mutuals, not-for-profits, and voluntary sector organizations associated with alternative development models, people before profits, and democratic participation. It is important to compare and understand the similarities and differences among social economy actors in northern Saskatchewan and their urban and rural counterparts. The second objective is to document the social economy's social, economic, and cultural contributions to the community. A closer examination of the social economy in particular will render a more accurate picture of the economic and social situation in La Ronge. Traditional development indicators such as income and educational attainment statistics may distort assessments of the economic and social health of local communities. Third, this study set out to highlight the opportunities and challenges facing the social economy in La Ronge, which may face opportunities and challenges that existing academic literature does not capture or address. Furthermore, it is important to identify the successes and challenges of the social economy that transcend northern, rural, and urban contexts. Some successes and challenges for the social economy may have gone unnoticed within the policy and administrative silos that tend to group development into northern, rural, and urban components.

This case study was conducted as part of an internship with the Community-University Institute for Social Research, University of Saskatchewan. Research was completed in two phases, the first during the summer of 2006. Researchers travelled to the community of La Ronge and stayed for four days, collecting data through semi-structured interviews with key participants from leading social economy organizations in the area. In August 2006, a series of unexpected personal circumstances prevented research interns from completing the project. Work on the project resumed in June 2008 with the hiring of a new research intern

working with the same principal investigator (Dr. Isobel M. Findlay). In August of that year, the researcher visited La Ronge and conducted updated interviews with a number of participants to ensure that interview data was current and accurate.

Potential participants were given a brief introduction explaining the purpose and procedure of the project, after which they were able to agree or not agree to participate in the study (Appendix A). This study was approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board. Interview participants were asked to review the Interview Consent Form and invited to ask any questions that they might have regarding the purpose of the project and its research procedure (Appendix B). A signed consent form was obtained from each participant at the beginning of each interview.

In total, researchers conducted twelve face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. All research participants were involved with the social economy in some capacity, including organizational managers, employees, board members, and volunteers. Researchers prepared an interview guide that was modified to fit the specific position of each interviewee (Appendix C). Participants selected the interview locations, with most interviews taking place on the site of the participants' respective organizations. This allowed for some direct observation on the part of the researchers, who, for instance, were present during a Northern Entertainment Co-operative board meeting. Participants also provided researchers with secondary sources of data such as research reports.

The face-to-face interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed. Participants were provided an opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure it accurately reflected the contents and meaning of what they had intended. Participants were also provided with a copy of their transcripts and were asked to add, alter, and/or delete any part of the transcript they wanted to, after which they signed a transcript release form, indicating that it was approved and able to be used as data for the research project.

Organization of the Report

This report is organized into five sections. First, we provide a brief introduction to the community of La Ronge, including an overview of its core administrative components as well as its demographic, social, and economic characteristics. The second part of this report further details the historical, social, and economic context of La Ronge and identifies a number of key opportunities and challenges currently facing the community. Issues such as

isolation, globalization, economic development, housing, education, training, and race and gender relations affect the community in crucial ways. The next section documents how social economy actors in La Ronge are responding to the key issues identified in part two. Social economy organizations in La Ronge play important roles in the economic, social, and cultural well-being of the community. The social economy has been a key source of local involvement and innovation in the development of programs and strategies aimed at coping with complex and difficult issues. The fourth part describes the ways in which social economy groups and organizations collaborate with one another to better serve their clients and members and to use resources more effectively. In the last section, we identify and discuss a number of challenges that often frustrate or prevent social economy actors from doing more.

The Community of La Ronge

For the purposes of this study, the community of La Ronge is comprised of three smaller communities: the Town of La Ronge; the Northern Village of Air Ronge; and the Lac La Ronge Indian Band (LLRIB) lands, including the Far Reserve and the Kitsaki Reserve. The broader community will be referred to as La Ronge for the remainder of this report, while the specific administrative community of La Ronge will be referred to as the Town of La Ronge. Each community is a distinct legal jurisdiction with its own local administration, elected leadership, services and programs, and relationships with both the federal and the provincial governments. With a population of 2,725, the Town of La Ronge is the largest community in northern Saskatchewan (StatCan 2007d). As a major service centre for the North, La Ronge is home to the La Ronge Health Care Centre, a public library, one elementary school, one high school, and several postsecondary education institutions.

Somewhat smaller in population, with 1,032 people, the Northern Village of Air Ronge (Air Ronge) is located two kilometres south of the Town of La Ronge (StatCan 2007a). Air Ronge has several businesses, service centres, and institutions, including one elementary school. Residents have access to a number of services located in the Town of La Ronge, including health services and fire and police protection services.

The LLRIB is the largest First Nation in Saskatchewan, with over 8,300 members (Lac La Ronge Indian Band 2009). LLRIB has six reserve communities with eighteen separate reserve lands stretching from central to northern Saskatchewan. Proud of their Cree heritage, members practise the dominant language, Woodland Cree. The La Ronge reserve community,

comprised of the Far and Kitsaki Reserves, has a combined population of more than 2,200 people (StatCan 2007b, 2007c). The central LLRIB office is located in the La Ronge reserve community and administers band services and programs in education, employment, social services, health services, housing, and economic development.

Unlike many small communities in Saskatchewan, La Ronge has a young and growing population, due mainly to the demographics of the large Aboriginal community in northern Saskatchewan. In total, La Ronge has a population of 6,000 residents. In comparison to Saskatchewan's overall demographic profile, La Ronge has a high Aboriginal population, with more than 75 percent of its residents being of Aboriginal ancestry, either First Nation or Métis (StatCan 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d). The community's Aboriginal population had a median age of 25.4 years and a growth rate of 14.4 percent between 2001 and 2006 (StatCan 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d). In comparison, the median age for Saskatchewan is 38.7 years with a growth rate of -1.1 percent between 2001 and 2006 (StatCan 2007a).

Several key economic sectors in northern Saskatchewan create significant economic activity in the community of La Ronge. The mining, exploration, and oil and gas sectors have created a great deal of economic activity throughout the region. With high market prices and high demand for minerals such as uranium and gold, the mining and exploration sector in northern Saskatchewan has the potential to employ more than 2,500 long-term workers for years to come (Northlands College et al. 2009). As the second largest producer of oil and the third largest producer of natural gas in Canada, there is a considerable need for labourers in Saskatchewan's oil and gas industry (Northlands College et al. 2009). Meanwhile, the commercial services sector, including business services, transportation services, and tourism, is a significant economic driver in the North, employing nearly one-third of the labour force in northern Saskatchewan (Northlands College et al. 2009). And the demand for construction workers increases as the need for residential housing and commercial construction rises (Northlands College et al. 2009). Finally, the public and noncommercial services sector is the largest sector in northern Saskatchewan, employing nearly one-half of the northern labour force (Northlands College et al. 2009). This sector provides important health and social services and is comprised of provincial, federal, and band institutions and employees.

The traditional economy plays an important role in economic development in the North and of Aboriginal communities in particular. For instance, the Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association Co-operative Inc. (NSTAC), a nonprofit co-operative that represents more than twenty-four hundred trappers living in northern Saskatchewan, has a total of

eighty fur blocks, each of which has about fifty-five trap lines (Pattison and Findlay 2010). In addition to the economic benefits of the fur trade, the NSTAC provides cultural, educational, and social benefits for trappers, their families, and communities. And Kitsaki Management Limited Partnership — the business arm of the LLRIB — uses traditional Aboriginal knowledge to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources in its business activities and to achieve sustainable, long-term economic development (McKay 2004; Pattison and Findlay 2010).

While the forestry sector has traditionally been a major employer in northern Saskatchewan, it has been adversely affected by a number of factors, including a strong Canadian dollar, a weak US housing market, an increase in international competition, and less demand for paper products (Northlands College et al. 2009). As a result, exports continue to decline.

Although distinct in many ways, the three communities of La Ronge are inextricably linked to one another. They share a common history and geographic area and have worked and played alongside one another for decades. Changes in economic, social, environmental, and political conditions and circumstances affect all three communities, and a collaborative and integrated approach is often required to work through the challenges and opportunities associated with such changes.

Current Situation: Opportunities and Challenges

This section aims to develop a more detailed description of La Ronge. By drawing upon, and bringing together, historical and current literature and interview data, researchers identified a number of opportunities and challenges facing La Ronge today. The first two parts assess how La Ronge's isolation and the forces of globalization impact the community. The next part discusses the historical legacy of the creation and subsequent abolition of the Department of Northern Saskatchewan (DNS). The fourth part examines the ways in which the transient nature of employees in La Ronge has shaped the community. And the last three issues address the shortage of skilled labour, a precarious housing crisis, and race, class, and gender divisions.

Isolation

The geography of the La Ronge area is both its greatest asset and its greatest liability. Located on the scenic shores of Lac La Ronge, the community is in Canadian Shield territory surrounded by coniferous forests, rocky outcrops, and lakes — a strikingly beautiful

setting more akin to a stereotype of northern Ontario than of Saskatchewan. To some extent, this rugged yet beautiful terrain has shaped La Ronge and its development in a unique way. Situated two and a half hours north of Prince Albert, its location and natural surroundings make it both a gateway to the North and an endpoint for many.

As a gateway, La Ronge has provided access to the rest of northern Saskatchewan for many decades. The completion of a gravel road to the community and the establishment of an aircraft re-fuelling point in the 1930s and 1940s made it a destination for those wanting to explore the region's seemingly endless natural resources (Saskatchewan Northern Affairs (SNA) 2002). The North became a destination for those searching for business opportunities or employment in gold mining, freighting, commercial fishing, forestry, and fur (SNA 2002). The position of La Ronge as a gateway to the North intensified throughout the 1970s with the paving of the highway from Prince Albert, the establishment and expansion of DNS, and the development of uranium mining and processing in northern Saskatchewan (SNA 2002). Today, La Ronge continues to be the hub for government service providers for residents of smaller, more remote communities accessible only by air or seasonal road; for mining companies and their employees headed up to northern worksites; and for the more adventurous tourists seeking remote fishing, camping, and trekking destinations.

At the same time, La Ronge is the last significant economic, distribution, service, or tourist centre on the road north. In this sense, it is an endpoint for those coming from both the North as well as the south. For example, it serves as a main base for several educational institutions and health care services, including Northlands College, the Northern Teacher Education Program, the Northern Professional Access College, and the only hospital and long-term care facility in the Mamawetan Health District, which covers most of northeastern Saskatchewan.

While its location may have some advantages, La Ronge's isolation also makes it less desirable for some kinds of economic investment. For example, the probable location of a fish plant for fish co-operatives, many of which are located in northern Saskatchewan, is Prince Albert. As one co-operative development officer explained:

P.A. would be the [ideal] location because it's the focus of the roads and everybody can get to it... If it was in La Ronge and you're coming from Cumberland House, you're running six hours plus to La Ronge... And with Prince Albert as the location, some of the Alberta people want to sign on as well.

La Ronge's isolation may also exacerbate problems related to a lack of locally available services and support networks, even though it is the main business and service hub for northern communities. One participant, for example, explained that individuals with learning disabilities in La Ronge must move away from their family, friends, and community to Prince Albert if they want to upgrade their education. This presents a serious challenge as most people require financial, social, and emotional support to succeed in school.

Some participants also noted a lack of recreational activities in La Ronge, especially for local youth. For several participants, this was particularly concerning. One felt that the lack of extracurricular activities for young people in La Ronge was contributing to youth crime:

Crime among the young people is on the increase.... The biggest crime I see now with the youth is vandalism for the sake of vandalism and graffiti.... I've heard comments from people saying that they're not comfortable here anymore and they're thinking about leaving.... It doesn't seem like there's any direction or that they know what to do or how to do it.

Even though Prince Albert has many recreational and youth activities, it is too far for regular travel for most residents.

Globalization

Despite its isolation, or perhaps because of it, La Ronge is a community in transition and is susceptible to the ebb and flow of the forces of globalization. First, two of the major employers, Areva and Cameco, are the largest uranium mining companies in the world. There is also much discussion in the community about kimberlite exploration. As a result, La Ronge's economy is susceptible to the boom-bust cycle of a resource-based economy.

Second, the restructuring of the welfare state in the 1980s and 1990s significantly affected the community. In 1983, the Progressive Conservative government abolished DNS, the department responsible for delivering most provincial government programs in northern Saskatchewan. Officials transferred DNS programs back to traditional line departments and placed a strong emphasis on expanding the role of private-sector organizations. Hundreds of government jobs based in La Ronge disappeared or were transferred to more central locations, particularly Regina. This restructuring, coupled with technological developments such as the Internet, teleconference, and satellite technologies, made it possible to deliver and administer services to northern communities from Regina-based offices.

Third, improvements in transportation and communication have brought both challenges and opportunities to the community. Improvements in the highway to Prince Albert make La Ronge even more feasible as a gateway to the North, as goods can be trucked in and tourists can travel with greater certainty and ease. Technological advancements have also made it possible for La Ronge residents to complete postsecondary courses via the Internet and teleconference. At the same time, improvements in transportation and communication make it easier for residents to drive south and shop at big-box stores such as Wal-Mart or Canadian Tire, which results in economic leakage to larger centres. Finally, as people increasingly use the Internet to obtain information, La Ronge risks losing many of its youth to larger cities.

The Culture of Big Government and a Legacy of Dependency

In 1972, the newly elected NDP government led by Alan Blakeney created the Department of Northern Saskatchewan to increase the level of government services and programs available to northerners. The DNS budget grew from \$21 million in 1972–73 to \$103 million in 1982–83 (SNA 2002). Other provincial agencies, such as the Department of Highways and Justice, also invested heavily in northern Saskatchewan (SNA 2002). Over a period of ten years, major investments were made in virtually all areas of life for residents of northern Saskatchewan — in infrastructure, in social and economic matters, and in uranium development (SNA 2002).

Although abolished in 1983, DNS had a profound impact on La Ronge and this legacy is apparent today. One long-time resident and government employee explained:

[La Ronge] has been, and still is, considered by some as the “Regina of the North” because it was a government town for so many years. It was a government within a government for all intents and purposes. Every line department that existed in Regina was replicated within DNS, so that created La Ronge as you see it today. It was set up as a government town.... [DNS] spent hundreds of millions of dollars every year. It set up a huge infrastructure here and it provided a major source of employment.... It’s what set up this town. There were a thousand government employees just in the town of La Ronge. That’s scaled down significantly now to maybe a hundred.

The large provincial government presence helped make La Ronge the hub and unofficial “capital” of the North. This provides some confidence in the future as La Ronge has much of the necessary infrastructure to be the central destination for northern development.

To some extent, however, there exists a legacy of dependence on government work, services, and programs. Although the level of services and programs has been scaled back dramatically, there is still a strong expectation that government will provide the necessary resources and supports. When asked whether the public viewed his organization as a government institution more than a financial institution, one economic development officer responded:

Absolutely. Since I took over loans, I get a lot of calls about where people can find grants. They don't want to borrow money, but they would like some free money because years ago there was lots of money out there.

While discussing the community's involvement and support for economic development policies, one participant stated:

You don't see a whole lot [of support] from the community of La Ronge [for] forestry or mining exploration policies [and] those kinds of larger issues because we've always been taken care of by the provincial agencies that are here. Everybody expects them to take care of us.

Individual and community dependence on government resources and programs has, at least in part, prevented local residents from participating in the development of their own community.

Skills Shortage and a Transient Population

Traditionally, La Ronge has had a more transient population than many small communities. This is due, in part, to a shortage of skilled labour in the local population. Fifty-eight percent of northern Saskatchewan residents have less than a high-school diploma, compared to 30 percent of people in the rest of the province (Northlands et al. 2009). Similarly, while 42 percent of Saskatchewan residents have postsecondary qualifications from a college or a university, or a trade, only 26 percent of those in the province's north have the same (Northlands et al. 2009). Although northern Saskatchewan has a relatively young population, its labour force participation rate is only 50 percent and unemployment rates hover around 20 percent (Northlands et al. 2009). Many northern communities offer limited opportunities to gain work experience outside the traditional economy. Local residents often do not have the educational requirements, skill level, or experience required by employers in northern

Saskatchewan and cannot gain employment without innovative interventions and accommodations such as those offered by the Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association Co-operative (Pattison and Findlay 2010), La Ronge Hotel and Suites (Conference Board of Canada 2002), or Michelin's partnerships with Aboriginal peoples in Nova Scotia (Sloan and Oliver 2009).

In addition, government workers, particularly those who are young and starting their careers, are often from the south and take a position in northern Saskatchewan to gain experience, with the hope of transferring to a posting in the south. One participant explained:

At the professional level ... you are parachuted in, especially in government. There is a tendency up here for young people, especially if they just graduated or are early to mid-twenties, to come and pad their resumé. There's no real intention of staying.

According to one participant, sometimes the job itself, as in the case of RCMP officers or school teachers, requires people to move in and out of the community:

A lot of the jobs themselves are transient, not just the people. If you get transferred here, you get transferred away from here. Some of them stay but most leave. They get experience and they go. That's life in the North.

A strong mining sector in northern Saskatchewan has also contributed to a transient population, as skilled workers and tradespeople are often imported from the south as well as other provinces. In some cases, these workers have few connections to the community; many fly into La Ronge on a two-week basis, making them less likely to establish roots and stay long term.

Several participants suggested that those who do not foresee staying in La Ronge are less likely to take part in local events, voluntary activities, or community organizations. One person felt that the community's population is more stable and sedentary now, but noted that the impact of a transient population lingers:

The problem is that we still have the mentality of a transient community. People often don't get involved and we don't have that small-town Saskatchewan feel. It's kind of a continuation of that transient lifestyle that people have, even though it is more stable now.

At the same time, one participant remarked, some local residents are reluctant to meet newcomers: “I remember people saying that they didn’t think those people were going to be here for very long, so they didn’t really want to bother to get to know them because you would have invested all this time in these people and then they would be gone.” Together, the transient nature of the community and the perception that newcomers will not stay make it difficult to engage new residents in community activities. Active community members, therefore, tend to be those with deep roots in the community and with a vested interest in making the community a better place to live.

Housing Crisis

There is a serious housing crisis in La Ronge. For many residents, it is difficult to find affordable, suitable, and safe housing. According to one participant, “We’re verging on slum area stuff in some of the housing.... The housing shortage is just so incredibly bad here.” There are several factors that contribute to this situation. First, there are few affordable entry-level ownership opportunities for first-time buyers in the market, particularly for low-income individuals or families. Like many Saskatchewan communities in recent years, La Ronge has experienced significant increases in property values and rental prices. As Table 1 indicates, the median monthly payments for rented and owned dwellings in the towns of both La Ronge and Air Ronge were higher than the Saskatchewan median. The high cost of housing is due partly to the influx of highly skilled, well-paid workers into the community.

Table 1: Median monthly payments for rented and owner-occupied dwellings, 2006

Community	Median monthly payments for rented dwellings	Median monthly payments for owner-occupied dwellings
Saskatchewan	\$568	\$614
La Ronge	\$659	\$792
Air Ronge	\$792	\$899

(Source: Statistics Canada 2007a, 2007c)

Second, the housing shortage is accentuated by the housing situation endemic to on-reserve housing across Canada. Shortages, overcrowding, and inadequate housing standards have been a long-standing problem on many First Nation reserves across the country. In a report for NorthSask Special Needs Housing, Employment, Recreation Inc., Rozon (2006)

estimated that there were between three hundred and six hundred applications for new housing on LLRIB lands. This report concluded that the demand for housing on-reserve far exceeded the number of dwellings available to on-reserve residents.

Third, there is a shortage of affordable and clean rental units in La Ronge. Those who cannot afford the market price for rental dwellings often have no choice but to live in dilapidated, slum-like units, or outside the community. An employee of Northlands College described the rental situation facing many students coming to study in La Ronge:

[The rental units] are like slums... Northlands and NORTEP have apartments that are subsidized through us, but they are usually full. [The students] couldn't afford to pay market value because their bands only give them a limited living allowance each month. If you have to pay for all your utilities and \$600 or \$700 rent, there is no money left for food or clothes. And most of these people are adult learners and are coming with kids.

For people receiving social assistance, average market rent payments exceed, and sometimes even double, monthly shelter allowances (Rozon 2006).

Finally, although some nonmarket housing is available in La Ronge, more is needed to meet existing demand. In 2006, the La Ronge Regional Housing Authority had one hundred social housing units available; however, vacancy rates are low and waiting lists are long (Rozon 2006). Priority is given to families, making it difficult for single people to secure social housing, and few units are designed to accommodate people with disabilities (Rozon 2006). One participant identified the lack of a local group home for people with disabilities as a significant obstacle for some of his clients:

[A] lot of the people we work with would do well in employment if they lived in a group home. We don't have a single group home in northern Saskatchewan for adults with disabilities. Adults with disabilities are living with families and, in some cases, there are ten or more people living in a house... I have probably five or ten individuals who would do well if they had some place to go to at night, a bed to sleep in, their own room, and someone to wake them up in the morning, make sure that they have breakfast, take their medication, get them to work, get them home after work, and get them some supper... If you opened a group home with eight beds in [La Ronge], it would be full in no time.

For some residents with low-incomes, physical and/or cognitive disabilities, and mental illness or addictions issues, the lack of affordable, safe, and suitable housing in La Ronge has resulted in these individuals having no permanent home at all. In 2006, it was estimated that 214 people with a cognitive and/or a physical disability in the Lac La Ronge area were considered homeless, with most individuals staying with family and friends for short periods of time (Rozon 2006). The community also has an urgent need for more emergency shelter, second-stage housing, and supported housing (Rozon 2006).

Race, Class, and Gender Divisions

More than half of La Ronge's population is of Aboriginal ancestry, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people interact with one another on many levels. The children go to school and play sports together while their parents work with one another. One participant noted, "If you walk downtown, you see people from lots of different backgrounds shopping in the same stores and walking down the same streets." Another participant commented, "One of the nice things about La Ronge ... is that a lot of the racist issues that I've experienced in the south aren't as obvious here.... People are not so much separated by race lines as they are by class and economics." Both the historical experience of living and working together and the integration of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth are promising signs of positive race relations for the future.

Currently, however, there remain significant race, class, and gender divisions within the community. Despite some level of integration among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents, a closer look at the physical separation between on-reserve and off-reserve, as well as class divisions, reveals strong racial undercurrents. The jurisdictional boundaries physically separate both LLRIB reserves from La Ronge and Air Ronge. As one participant explains, this physical and jurisdictional separation sometimes has surprising and alarming consequences for the level of interaction between on-reserve and off-reserve residents:

I employed a summer staff person who was supposed to take posters on-reserve. She didn't do it. I found these posters and asked, "You didn't take them? How come you didn't take them?" She responded, "I've never been out there before and I didn't feel comfortable." This person has lived here all her life and she had never gone there.... That was a real shock to me because you think, surely, as a teenager you would be intrigued or adventurous. I'm not saying that's a majority of people, but I'm surprised.

The experience of a local childcare co-operative also illustrates how class and racial divisions impact the kinds of services used by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in La Ronge. According to staff at the La Ronge Childcare Co-op, almost all of their members are Aboriginal, even though membership in the co-operative is open to everyone in the community regardless of race or cultural heritage. When asked about the low number of non-Aboriginal clients at the co-op, one participant stated, “White people take their kids to babysitters and Aboriginal people go to the daycare.”

Racial divisions appear to cut across gender lines as well. One economic development officer noted that women, particularly those who are Aboriginal, are less likely than men to apply for business loans:

A very small portion of [borrowers] are women, about 25 percent or less... The percentage of Aboriginal women coming in is much less than 25 percent. For men, it is about fifty-fifty Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal... I don't think [women] are encouraged to start businesses. That's the feedback we got back from our [peer lending] group. It is like the man is supposed to take care of you ... and that you are taking a job away from a man. Some of the attitudes are still very much like that.

One female participant and long-time community member expressed her frustration with the historically male-dominated Air Ronge Village Council:

I'm thinking about running for village council next year. There isn't a single woman on Air Ronge Village Council, and supposedly there has only been one or two in the last decade or two. I'm hoping to go in and shake things up a bit if I get elected. I think they need more planning in a more comprehensive way.

Demographic diversity in representative and leadership structures is part of an equitable and fair society and is a key feature of healthy democratic institutions and communities. Without the participation of key groups and stakeholders in political, business, and community institutions, the interests, viewpoints, and perspectives of underrepresented groups will not be adequately considered, which in turn will compromise the legitimacy of these institutions.

In summary, all three La Ronge communities are deeply affected by the opportunities and challenges before them. La Ronge is susceptible to the ebb and flow of the forces of

globalization, which brings with it both the promises and perils of technological advances, easier transportation, and the global economy. As a hub of government services, programs, and work, the community has reaped the benefits of infrastructure development, but has also suffered a legacy of dependence on government supports and investment. While the in-migration of highly skilled, well-paid labourers to the community has contributed to a strong housing market, many local residents find themselves unable to find affordable, safe housing for themselves or their families. Underlying many of these issues are race, class, and gender divisions, which make it more difficult for some individuals and groups to cope with the challenges before them.

The next section looks at the different ways in which the social economy is responding to many of the issues identified above.

RESPONSES FROM THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

THIS SECTION IDENTIFIES AND EXAMINES the innovative ways in which social economy organizations have approached some of the challenges facing La Ronge today. The first part discusses how a number of community-based and nonprofit organizations have set out to reduce the level of economic leakage from La Ronge and to promote local businesses. The second details several social economy organizations that individuals and businesses can draw upon to start or develop their organizations. The third shows how the social economy plays a key role in promoting and enhancing educational and skill development opportunities, not only for those in the La Ronge area, but for northerners in general. The fourth part examines how social economy organizations in La Ronge are committed to improving the quality of life of residents through the provision of health, safety, and recreational services. The fifth and sixth parts look at how social economy organizations preserve and support the re-learning of traditional Aboriginal knowledge and cultural practices and promote the values of diversity and inclusion.

Economic Leakage

Together, La Ronge's geographic isolation and improvements to transportation infrastructure contribute to economic leakage to the larger, more urban centres in the south. By promoting local businesses, re-investing profits into the community, and developing strategies to keep resources in the local economy, the La Ronge Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber), the co-op, Conexus Credit Union, and a number of local nonprofits play important roles in reducing the level of economic leakage from the community.

Re-established in 2003, the Chamber promotes trade and commerce in the community and provides a unified voice for local businesses. Several community organizations and local businesses were involved in the creation of the new Chamber, including the co-op, the local branch of Conexus Credit Union, and Visions North Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC). Among the first events organized by the Chamber was a "shop locally" campaign aimed at increasing the visibility of local businesses and encouraging residents to buy from local establishments. According to several participants, the new Chamber of Commerce was welcomed as a positive development for the local economy and a much-needed association to promote business development within the community.

Co-operatives have played, and continue to play, important roles in meeting the needs of local residents by ensuring fair prices for members and other consumers and reducing economic leakage to the south. Historically, the La Ronge Co-op was viewed as an alternative to the mainstream Northern Store, better known by its more popular name, the Hudson's Bay Company. And the credit union also brought needed financial competition to the community.

It could be argued that the traditional co-operative sector — the co-op and Conexus Credit Union — are no longer responding to monopolistic pressures but rather, play an important role in the community by reducing the level of economic leakage. For example, the large and newly upgraded co-op provides members with a greater selection of goods, reducing the need to shop in Prince Albert or Saskatoon. One resident stated, "I'm excited for us because it's a big deal to have such an amazing store in such a small community, especially a northern community." The co-operative model also ensures that profits remain in the community. The co-op re-invests profits back into the organization, distributes dividends to members, and provides financial support to a number of local organizations, events, and ini-

tiatives. Co-ops have a keen interest in investing in their communities because their success as businesses depends on the economic and social health of their members and communities.

Finally, as part of their goal to reduce economic leakage from the community, Visions North CFDC developed a strategy in 2002 to improve the leisure offerings in La Ronge. With the closure of the last movie theatre in 1985, Visions North helped establish the Northern Entertainment Co-op (NEC), which aimed to organize and help raise funds for a new theatre and performing arts complex in the community. A business development grant from the Government of Saskatchewan provided funds for NEC to complete a feasibility study. According to Rosten Bergsma Business Solutions (2006), 97 percent of those surveyed were in favour of establishing a locally owned and operated theatre complex. In the end, it was determined that a basic theatre with one movie screen located on co-op land was a viable business venture.

During the first round of interviews in 2006, several interviewees demonstrated optimism and excitement about the prospect of establishing a theatre in La Ronge. One participant responded, “Any development like that just screams out ‘You don’t have to go south. You have stuff here.’” Regrettably, NEC was struck from the co-op registrar because it was unable to afford a professional financial audit, a requirement of the provincial government as a condition of receiving the business development grant.

Business and Organizational Development

Social economy organizations in La Ronge contribute to the creation and strengthening of local businesses and nonprofit organizations in many ways. First, there are a number of financial institutions and funds to which individuals or groups may apply for business financing. For traditional or mainstream businesses, financing is available from Conexus Credit Union, Visions North CFDC, and several government sources. Aboriginal individuals and businesses may also apply for financing or grants from several sources, including Aboriginal Business Canada, Visions North CFDC, and the Aboriginal Business Development Fund. For individuals or groups that do not meet traditional or mainstream lending criteria, business loans may be obtained from Visions North CFDC and the Northern Development Fund. The latter are particularly important for nonprofit or community-based organizations whose business models may not include significant, if any, profit margins.

Next, social economy organizations facilitate organizational development by providing cost-effective services and products to other organizations. The Keewatin Career Development Centre (KCDC), for example, is a nonprofit umbrella organization for career service agencies in northern Saskatchewan, including school divisions, tribal councils, development corporations, and postsecondary institutions, for which it provides support and technological products and training. Although private-sector businesses may purchase its services, KCDC's main clientele are nonprofits and community-based organizations. As a nonprofit, KCDC provides products and services to its clients at more affordable rates than would be available from the private sector. One employee explains:

There is a real place for ... nonprofit organizations in community development and in specific areas like technology.... Our primary clientele are community schools and other nonprofits, so we can deal nonprofit to nonprofit. ... It is important for these organizations that don't have as much money.... There is room and a real need for the nonprofit sector to be providing this kind of service.

The provision of KCDC's services on a nonprofit basis allows its clients to better meet, or expand, their organizational objectives.

Finally, Visions North CFDC offers new and existing business owners the opportunity to work with an experienced businessperson through the Business Mentorship Program (BMP). One Visions North CFDC employee explained that training is a critical step to successful business ownership:

Some [people] don't think they have the skills to run their own businesses.... The emphasis should be on training. You can head off the problems before they become big problems. One of the key areas that I see deficient in some [business] start-ups is bookkeeping. It is so critical to the success of your business.... I always push clients to get as much education and training as possible.

To date, four experienced local entrepreneurs have been trained as mentors for the BMP. Visions North CFDC has notified other local agencies about the BMP and the fact that the program is available to both potential and existing business owners.

Education and Skill Development

Social economy organizations in La Ronge provide programs and services to enhance educational, training, and employment opportunities for northerners. Northlands College, KCDC, and the Gary Tinker Federation for the Disabled Inc. (GTF) clearly demonstrate the important contributions made by social economy actors in this area.

Northlands College is a postsecondary institution serving northern communities with three different campus locations in addition to online services and programs available through the Saskatchewan Communications Network. Directed by a nine-member board of directors, all of whom are northern residents, the college develops training programs based on the needs of various stakeholders, including communities, Aboriginal agencies, economic development corporations, government, and industry. Northlands College offers a diverse array of programs ranging from basic literacy programs, Radiation Environment Technician training, to Continued Care Assistant training, as well as online university courses from the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Regina, and the University of the Arctic. Northlands College also offers students critical support services, such as tutoring, career counselling, and career development guidance.

Over the past two decades, Northlands College has trained thousands of northerners who then went on to find employment in the region. Some students build on their existing skills and knowledge base. For example, when asked whether their recent experience at Northlands College affected their work at the La Ronge Childcare Co-op, two long-term staff members noted, “Yeah, the way you look at kids. You try and see what the problem is. It’s not the child; it’s something they have.... [The course] teaches you how to design a room for each age level.”

The Gary Tinker Federation has also made significant contributions to the education, training, and employment of northerners by organizing workshops, creating employment opportunities, and providing employment counselling services for people with cognitive and/or physical disabilities. Funded by both the provincial and federal governments (Saskatchewan Postsecondary Education and Skills Training — Northern Branch, the Employment Assistance for People with Disabilities, Human Resources and Skill Development Canada, and Career and Employment Services), GTF creates contracts with private, public, and co-operative organizations to employ its members. Importantly, GTF aims to create interesting and meaningful employment:

The ultimate goal is full-time, long-term, and meaningful employment. Not just pushing a broom or picking up garbage. We want the person to remain long term. Our six-month contribution allows the employer to get an understanding of what kind of productivity the individual is capable of.

GTF goes beyond finding jobs for its members; it creates employment opportunities “by re-imagining, by contracting, by employer engagement, by re-fashioning, or job carving.” As a small, member-run nonprofit organization, GTF is able to act quickly and creatively and be flexible in its approach to serving its members. One participant noted that because all board members have some sort of disability, GTF is governed by people with a deep sense of compassion and understanding towards members.

Health and Safety

Some social economy organizations in La Ronge have come together to improve the health and safety of its residents and visitors. Conexus Credit Union donated \$15,000 to the Keewatin Onitonikewuk Search and Rescue Inc. (KOSAR), a local nonprofit serving La Ronge and other northern communities. With this sponsorship, KOSAR purchased a trailer to provide a base for its team members. While KOSAR provides critical search and rescue services to hunters, hikers, fishers, and other outdoor enthusiasts, its presence also provides a compelling reason for local residents and visitors to choose La Ronge as their outdoor adventure destination.

Recreation

There have been formidable efforts within the social economy to create and enhance arts and entertainment options for local residents. Despite the disappointing result of NEC’s efforts, the drive to establish and develop local arts and entertainment activities remains strong. The hope and expectation of provincial funding to renovate and improve Churchill High School, located in the Town of La Ronge, brought together several community members and groups to discuss opportunities to incorporate art and entertainment facilities into the renovation plans. Individuals from the La Ronge Town Council, Churchill High School, the arts council, and members of the former NEC have informally discussed the possibility of partnering with one another to build a swimming pool, a theatre and per-

forming arts complex, a dance studio, a recording studio, and a new public library in the school, many of which would be accessible to the public outside of school hours. One former NEC member noted: “This is a dream list, but it is the fact that people are interested in having the arts that is a good sign.” These efforts demonstrate a deep commitment among local residents and community groups to improve the quality of life for individuals and families in La Ronge.

Cultural Sustainability

Several social economy organizations work to promote the arts and Aboriginal culture and language in a variety of ways. The La Ronge Arts Council, for example, works towards creating demand for different forms of arts and entertainment from literature and storytelling to the blues and classical music. As one member of the council explained, their organization fills a gap that neither the public nor the private sectors have filled:

When you live in a community that’s a little more isolated, you have to make things happen. There is no Centennial Auditorium [now TCU Place in Saskatoon] to bring in things. There is no free enterprise [that is] creating possibilities. There are no university music programs that have spinoffs. So you have to try and work to make things happen.

In 2006, for instance, the arts council promoted the work of a classical music composer who lives in the community. School performances and public shows exposed local residents to classical music while at the same time promoting the talents of a community member. Although convincing community members to come out and support the arts can be frustrating and difficult at times, the arts council continues to actively promote local art and artists.

Aboriginal cultural preservation and dissemination can be found in the approach and work of both the Northern Saskatchewan Trappers Association Co-operative Inc. (NSTAC) and the La Ronge Hotel. Established in 1970, the NSTAC aims to address the concerns of trappers in northern Saskatchewan and is comprised of Métis and First Nations people. The NSTAC promotes and preserves Aboriginal traditions, cultures, and knowledge in meaningful and innovative ways. According to Pattison and Findlay (2010), “The practices passed on to youth preserve the cultural wisdom that sustains the welfare and spirit of Aboriginal communities” (36). The annual River Gathering Festival organized by the NSTAC, for example, includes cultural events such as canoe racing, which provides younger generations with

opportunities to make these traditions a part of their lived experience. The Justice Trapline — inspired and delivered by the NSTAC — is a program for young offenders who are selected to work and learn on a trapline instead of being institutionalized. This program aims to direct young offenders away from negative influences while learning about Aboriginal traditions and culture. Finally, the NSTAC recently started working to incorporate trapping and hunting curriculum into northern schools. One trapper explained that the students pray, participate in smudges, and speak only the Cree language when they are out on the trapline, where they use their brains and hearts and not the pencils of the classroom (Pattison and Findlay 2010). Through this program, the youth learn the value of both indigenous science and knowledge and mainstream education (Pattison and Findlay 2010).

Owned by the LLRIB, the La Ronge Hotel came up with a unique approach to hiring and training employees. The hotel seeks to develop and enhance the knowledge and skills of its employees — who may or may not have previous hotel or hospitality work experience — through the use of cultural traditions and knowledge. Management personnel use the oral culture of the Cree to train staff members, recognizing that some may have had little access to formal education. As a coaching method, storytelling has proven to be effective in guiding employees through new and unfamiliar situations (Conference Board of Canada 2002). Training videos are available in three languages — Cree, Dené, and English — and a Cree tutor is available for employees during several training activities. Furthermore, the hotel’s management understands and values the traditional way of life practised by some employees, one of whom, for example, works at the hotel during the summer months and returns to her family’s camp in the bush until the following summer (Conference Board of Canada 2002).

The efforts of the NSTAC and the La Ronge Hotel are more than symbolic acknowledgment of Aboriginal history and traditions. These organizations recognize that Aboriginal cultures, languages, traditions, and knowledge provide a basis for learning and understanding and the creation of meaningful opportunities (Pattison and Findlay 2010).

Diversity and Inclusion

By upholding and celebrating the values of diversity and inclusion, social economy organizations create a space in which all people experience a sense of belonging, safety, and trust. Employees at the La Ronge Childcare Co-op, for example, proudly refer to their organization as an “inclusion centre,” a place where any child is welcome and valued, regard-

less of their life experience or background. Here, children learn to build relationships with those who are different from themselves and to respect and celebrate their differences. One staff member explained:

This is an inclusion centre. We accept all kinds of kids. We have a child in a wheelchair. We had two autistic children and some children with behavioural problems.... All the papers on every door have a sentence about inclusion.... We welcome everybody and anybody.... I have never seen it anywhere else.... so we're special.

GTF is also strongly committed to fostering an environment of support and encouragement for its members. One employee told researchers:

We don't let them go. This is not a contract; this is a commitment. They are members of the federation. They are not just our clients.... They can participate at any level they want, but they are members.... We are engaged in a lifestyle change versus life skills or a momentary contract.

These organizations advocate and promote respect and belonging for all members of the community, and create a supportive and safe environment for those who are often marginalized and misunderstood by others.

To summarize, this section identified a number of ways in which the social economy in La Ronge has responded to the challenges currently facing the community. Social economy organizations have helped strengthen the economic, social, and cultural fabric of the community in a variety of ways:

- promoting local businesses
- facilitating the development of local organizations
- enhancing educational and skills development opportunities for northerners
- ensuring the health and safety of residents and visitors alike
- developing recreational activities and facilities
- preserving and promoting art, culture, and tradition
- creating diverse and inclusive environments open to all members of the community

The following section maps the different ways in which social economy organizations work with one another and with government and private-sector organizations to better serve their clients and community.

SYNERGIES, PARTNERSHIPS, AND COLLABORATIONS

THE ABILITY OF LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS to establish and develop working partnerships with one another is a key characteristic of communities that are capable of successfully responding to economic and social change (Community Resilience Project Team 1999). While it is important for social economy organizations to remain autonomous, flexible, and client- focussed, it is by working together that stakeholders can achieve broad community goals and successes. Researchers found several examples of successful partnerships and collaborations among social economy organizations, government institutions, and private sector organizations.

One form of collaboration is the provision of financial support from one organization to another. The Order of the Royal Purple service club, for example, donates to the Childcare Co-op on an annual basis. And before the dissolution of the NEC, the local Conexus Credit Union branch applied to its community advisory board — a decision- making body of the credit union that allocates funds to community economic development purposes — for a grant to support NEC and the construction of a local movie theatre.

Second, social economy organizations and groups have worked together to plan large, complex community projects. Although in the conceptual stages, the development of a multipurpose recreational facility at Churchill High School requires individuals, groups, and organizations to collectively and co-operatively set project objectives, strategies, and priorities. Former NEC members, the Arts Council, Churchill High School, and members of the La Ronge Town Council have discussed the potential purpose, design, and financing options for a multipurpose facility. According to one participant, the benefits of working together are clear:

The idea of this multipurpose facility and having every organization in the community having a possibility to use it may make it more feasible. The more often it's in use, the more chance we have to cover our operating costs. [This group] hope[s] to be one of those unifiers for the community and bring in other small, nonprofit organizations that have nowhere else to go. And we are hoping to get others to think that way as well.

This is an example of citizens taking an active role in community initiatives, demonstrating a strong capacity among local residents to address common concerns and develop local solutions.

Third, some social economy organizations serve many of the same individuals and/or groups, prompting organizations to work together for the benefit of their clients or members. Commenting on the relationship between GTF and KCDC, one KCDC representative explained that the two organizations work together often: "It's a pretty small community. Some of their clients access our technical services to get trained — technology is a benefit for a lot of people with disabilities." Although different in many ways, GTF and KCDC find common ground in their efforts to improve employment opportunities for northerners.

Fourth, CED organizations work together to reduce the duplication of services and to use resources more efficiently and effectively. When asked about the different sorts of partnerships in which Visions North CFDC is involved, one employee explained: "Partnership is very important up here. The cost of travel to go into these communities would be prohibitive for a lot of us, so being able to couple our dollars for training, projects, and travel is very important." In April 2008, for example, Visions North CFDC, Woodlands and Waterways Regional Development Authority, and Saskatchewan Northern Affairs worked together to plan and organize a Youth Conference. Grade eleven and twelve students from several northern communities were flown to La Ronge to attend the conference, which focussed partly on promoting existing education and employment opportunities for youth in northern Saskatchewan.

Fifth, some social economy organizations partner and collaborate with private sector enterprises in mutually beneficial ways. Areva and Cameco, for instance, often donate to local organizations such as the Childcare Co-op, and provide scholarship funds for local students, enhancing their organization's image and visibility in the community. The owner of the local Subway is a volunteer with Visions North CFDC's Business Mentorship Program. With the provincial government's six-month wage subsidy program, the Gary Tinker Foundation

is able to work with local employers, including Subway, the co-op, and the Town of La Ronge, to find employment opportunities for its members. The wage subsidy program pays for a portion of the employee's wage, while GTF members gain valuable work experience. And the hotel supports the Arts Council through the provision of free meeting spaces so members can plan events and programs.

Finally, the Northern Labour Market Committee (NLMC) is an excellent example of how multiple partnerships among social economy organizations, the public sector, and the private sector can facilitate a cohesive and organized approach to community economic development (CED). Established in 1983, the NLMC is comprised of eighty participants and includes educational, training, employment, and Aboriginal organizations (Northlands et al. 2008). Through this organization, stakeholders can collectively address economic development issues in northern Saskatchewan by sharing information, identifying challenges, and developing joint solutions. The organizations comprising the NLMC work together to set goals and develop strategies to address critical issues in the areas of health, education and training, employment, business development, and traditional economies in northern Saskatchewan. The 2009 report titled "The Northern Saskatchewan Regional Training and Assessment Report," for example, produced by Northlands College, the NLMC, and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Labour describes the recent labour market situation in northern Saskatchewan and identifies ways to bridge the needs of northern residents, educational and training institutions, and regional and local employers.

This section highlighted some of the ways in which social economy organizations in La Ronge help the community address challenges and take ownership of solutions. Despite this success, however, there is some frustration among social economy actors that stakeholders could work together more frequently, co-operatively, or effectively. The next section identifies and discusses some of the barriers that prevent social economy organizations from working together more closely.

CHALLENGES FACING THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

THE PREVIOUS SECTIONS PROVIDED SEVERAL EXAMPLES of how the social economy has successfully responded to some of the difficulties currently confronting La Ronge, as well as how these organizations contribute to the economic, social, and cultural well-being of the community. Still, the social economy faces a number of problems that limit its ability to do more. This section identifies three key challenges that adversely affect the ability of the social economy to address the needs of its clients and community. First, while many social economy organizations collaborate with one another, administrative and jurisdictional boundaries combined with a lack of communication prevent social economy organizations from working together more frequently and co-operatively. Second, social economy organizations are misunderstood and their contributions are not fully recognized by politicians, policy makers, and the public, frustrating the efforts of many social economy organizations. Third, financial and human resources shortages make it difficult for some social economy organizations to meet the needs of their clients or to expand their operations and services.

Co-operation and Collaboration

Participants identified two key factors that make it difficult for organizations to work together more frequently and co-operatively — the administrative and jurisdictional boundaries of the community and social economy organizations, and the lack of communication and collective planning among CED organizations.

Administrative and Jurisdictional Boundaries

La Ronge is a complex community with two municipalities and two LLRIB reserves. In addition, the relationship between the federal government and First Nations reserve

communities, and the presence of federally regulated industries such as uranium, fisheries, and airports, leads to a significant federal government presence in the community. La Ronge's central position in the North also makes it a hub of regional development for the provincial government. The plethora of administrative and jurisdictional boundaries of social economy organizations makes collaboration and co-ordination among organizations difficult.

One impact of the administrative and jurisdictional boundaries is that, although many CED organizations are located in La Ronge, most focus on northern Saskatchewan as a whole, with few CED efforts directed specifically at the community of La Ronge. As one participant explained:

We're not set up to service La Ronge; we're set up to service the North. We don't make any distinction [between La Ronge and other communities] and there's no specific initiatives directed at La Ronge per se. They tend to be broad-based, northern [and] regional initiatives.... So we don't focus specifically on the community of La Ronge.

Another participant believed that CED approaches used in smaller, more remote, and mainly Aboriginal northern communities may not be suitable for La Ronge:

La Ronge is an anomaly to the rest of the North in that we're a fifty-fifty Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population.... There's a lot of affluence in the non-Aboriginal population and there's a lot of poverty on the reserve side. That's a difference.... La Ronge doesn't really fit in the same mould as the northern communities.

Without a focussed effort on La Ronge, its unique attributes, challenges, and opportunities will be lost in the broad and sweeping development approaches for northern Saskatchewan.

The second impact of the administrative and jurisdictional boundaries is that they contribute to a sense of competition among organizations and communities. Even though many initiatives aim to benefit La Ronge as a whole, communities often compete for resources and investment. For example, the locations of the new fire hall and tourist information booth have recently sparked tension between residents of La Ronge and Air Ronge:

People think that everything goes to La Ronge. We [La Ronge] just got a new fire hall. The Woodlands and Waterways RDA have been working on

the tourist information centre for a really long time. It had always been located in Air Ronge.... Of course La Ronge says it has to go in La Ronge and Air Ronge says that it has always been in Air Ronge. I think it is really petty because as long as the community has access to it, who cares where it goes? And if it's not located in your jurisdiction, you don't have to take care of it. But they don't see it that way. It is all about what we want for us.

When funding shortages and competition for resources become more apparent, jurisdictional battles become more intense. The CEO of a local development organization noted:

[I]t's such a disparate group of people all across the board. Everybody has their own unique slice and everybody is struggling and trying to make ends meet within their particular regions.... There's a big sense of competition.... [T]he perception from the rest of the North is that La Ronge always has and always will have everything and they have nothing. So you'll never get the regional economic authorities, for example, in the northeast side working in collaboration with La Ronge on anything because they just figure they're going to get scooped in that process. [And] the bands have their own economic development initiatives.

Competition for investment, resources, and funding emphasizes the distinctions among the three communities, making it difficult for organizations to co-operate and establish long-term relationships that are needed in order to work together.

The third impact of jurisdictional and administrative boundaries stems from the tendency for governments to work within their respective jurisdictions or specific policy "silos." This makes it difficult to co-ordinate the delivery of services and programs and discourages the development of new and innovative ways to address the needs of the community. According to one participant, collaboration between the federal and provincial governments is sorely lacking:

The feds typically run their own policy. For the most part, they totally disregard the province. And the province feels like the poor second cousin and they act like the poor second cousin at the table when it comes to anything related to the potential of bringing together some policy that would potentially [be beneficial].... Within government, they have enough problems across departments let alone trying to get some type of federal-provincial collaboration.

It is inefficient.... You see duplication in health systems where the [Lac] La Ronge Indian Band will build a brand new quasi-hospital down the road when you've got a provincial one sitting down here. You'll see a multimillion dollar high school sitting on reserve and a high school [in La Ronge] that's squeezed for space and can't get provincial money.... There has to be way closer co-operation between the two levels of government.

One co-operative development officer noted that provincial authorities perceived his idea of an education co-op as an educational initiative, and therefore a responsibility of the Ministry of Education:

I was asked to hand over the education co-op to the education people, who have no idea what it is about, how to put it together, and who are usually into the fee-for-service mentality — “This is not your area. You should not be doing this.” Yet, there is all this demand in the communities for these kinds of things. People seem to be into this sort of reductionism — “This is all that I am responsible for and you better not trespass onto my area.”

The tendency for government to work within rigid departmental and policy lines limits the possibility of creative and multidisciplinary approaches to addressing local problems.

Communication

The second key factor that makes it difficult for social economy groups to work more closely with one another is the lack of communication among organizations. Earlier in this report, we identified and discussed examples of partnership, collaboration, and co-operation, demonstrating that some organizations communicate effectively with others. As one participant explained:

I can pick up the phone and call on those organizations at any time. There aren't any super-secret projects out there.... I wouldn't call it co-ordinated. We do bounce ideas off of each other. Do we have a regular meeting with all the economic development people? No. I don't really know what everyone else is working on. We talk about what we are working on ... but it is not formal.

According to some participants, however, many of whom have been involved in successful partnerships, there is an unfulfilled need for local organizations to work together more

often and more co-operatively. Past efforts to develop a formalized and structured method for CED organizations to come together, share information, and collaborate were not always successful. When asked about the efforts of social economy organizations to work together, one participant noted:

[Saskatchewan] Northern Affairs has tried a couple of times [to get organizations together]. They used to run these business forums. They were like any other conference [and] they sort of became like a show and tell. People got up and talked about what they were doing, but it never coalesced into anything after that. They never used the opportunity to follow up and actually start bringing some of those key people to another table to start talking about northern economic development.

Local politics, overextended staff, and a lack of leadership also prevent organizations from communicating effectively with one another. According to one longtime community member, people are reluctant to volunteer their time to facilitate a forum for people and organizations to come together:

Local politics is like a blood sport. Nobody wants to get into it because they know what they're going to be up against, and it takes some exceptional facilitation skills to steer that kind of process without watching it blow up in your face.

At the same time, many participants believed that better communication and greater collaboration among local organizations would reduce the duplication of services and prevent unpopular or misguided decisions. For instance, several participants noted the confusion among local residents regarding the band's decision to build a new arena on the reserve while one exists in the Town of La Ronge. Participants also commented on the town's decision to build a water treatment plant in the middle of the beach shortly after it created a committee dedicated to the beautification of the community. While there may or may not have been good reasons for these decisions, the confusion among residents is illustrative of problematic communication between local leadership and the community.

Participants also believed that greater collaboration and planning among social economy organizations would be beneficial for the clients or members of those organizations, and the social economy generally. One interviewee, for instance, felt that residents would benefit from a more centralized location for CED organizations in La Ronge:

We should all be located in one building.... There are all of these disjointed organizations located all over the place.... [I]t would make so much sense, in terms of [serving] clients, to have “one-stop shopping” and to pool resources. We are wasting resources by having separate offices and separate administration.... A lot more could be happening if they would work more efficiently together.

When asked whether Northlands College works with local co-ops or nonprofits to develop training programs with these sectors in mind, one Northlands employee explained that this would require a higher level of co-ordination and co-operation among the organizations:

It’s an area that could potentially be developed further, but not in isolation. We need Visions North and Northern Affairs — the regional and community-run economic development corporations. We need everybody working together on some kind of strategy on the same table. Until that occurs, we are going to respond on a one-on-one basis.

Overall, improved communication and collaboration would likely have both strategic and financial benefits for social economy organizations, their clients, and the broader community.

Understanding and Recognition of the Social Economy

A lack of understanding by government and the public about the role, approach, and goals of social economy organizations frustrates the efforts of many social economy actors in La Ronge. First, while there is a plethora of financial services and government programs designed to facilitate the development of profit-oriented enterprises, there are very few for nonprofits, co-operatives, and community-based organizations. Most social economy organizations have social as well as economic goals, and turning a profit may not be one of their key objectives. As a result, some economic development agencies do not fund or lend money to nonprofit groups. For example, the bylaws of Visions North CFDC prohibit the organization from lending to nonprofits. According to one employee, “They (nonprofit organizations) are stuck a lot of the time.” The lack of access to capital makes it difficult for individuals and groups to start or develop nonprofit and community-based organizations.

While governments have strongly supported private sector and industry development,

they have not recognized the full impact or importance of social economy organizations to CED. One participant, for instance, noted that government funding for co-op development is insufficient and, as a result, promising opportunities are missed:

I would like to have three co-op people here.... My district is three hundred thousand kilometres.... I've done more than fifty thousand kilometres.... The education co-operative is a phenomenal idea and I really want to set that up. But I have two fishermen co-ops under development right now.... I have a bulk fuel co-op in Uranium City [and] the trappers and the Justice Trapline. I would also like to get a car co-op going. There's also the women's co-op in Pinehouse. So you put all that on a plate and I have enough work for two or three people.

One participant working for a federally funded economic development corporation said that although the federal government has recognized some of the organization's qualitative accomplishments in recent years, it is sometimes difficult to measure the economic impact of their work:

[I]t is hard to quantify the work we do. For example, we did a women's conference last year. We invited people from all over the North — different economic groups, women from the women's shelter and businesses. I had the feeling that if one women walked away thinking she should go back to school or that she should really stand on her own feet, or get out of a relationship and go back to school or re-enter the workforce, it was a success.

In the end, the existing funding and evaluation frameworks do not adequately capture the potential or real achievements of social economy organizations.

Some participants were irritated with the overall level of knowledge and interest among politicians and policy makers about the role of the social economy and northern Saskatchewan in general. While discussing the role of CFDCs in local development, one employee of Visions North CFDC stated:

It is just a lack of awareness. Unless you are tied to, or involved as, a minister, you may not know (about CFDCs).... A lot of them [politicians] do not know what a community futures does, especially those in urban areas. But there are 260 offices across Canada, which is a lot. I am no different; I had no idea what a CFDC was before I came here.

For some, there is greater frustration and concern about the separation between the politicians and policy makers located in the south and the northern communities for which they make decisions:

I would like to have the people who make the policies spend some time in the North; to have them recognize our perspective and what we do every day; that a scooter for Gary Tinker in Pinehouse doesn't work in the mud and that he needs an ATV; that the price of a quart of milk is \$3.00 and \$12.00 in Stony Rapids.... We need people to come up here before they make a policy that affects us [and] they better come see how it really affects that person.

Finally, the role and objectives of social economy organizations are often misunderstood by the general public. When asked if the community recognized social economy organizations and their contributions to the community, one member of the Arts Council replied:

I don't think they do. It's the regard that people have for the arts and entertainment. For example, there are a couple of guys who play some pretty good blues stuff. They've been playing together for a pretty long time. They made a deal with the Eagle Point Resort to do a four-hour-a-night kind of thing. They had a \$10 cover at the door and that included food. When people heard there was a \$10 cover, they were walking away. It's a community that doesn't understand that stuff.... If you want people to commit to being in a place, you have to improve their quality of life; it's not just bricks and mortar.

At the same time, social economy organizations may need to do more to help residents understand their missions and purposes. How residents perceive local organizations is particularly important, according to one participant:

For a lot of people, in the North especially, there is this suspicion or mistrust of government bureaucracy.... A few months ago, I had a young lady come in and see me. She said, "I've walked by here four times and finally, today, I got the nerve up and just rushed in. I was asking for help before I even knew what I was doing." I asked why it took her four times and she said, "I was scared. I pictured you guys in here in suits and ties." I said to my staff that we had to change our image to make people feel more comfortable.

Overall, there is an urgent need for politicians, policy makers, and the general public to better understand the social economy and its role in the community. Social economy organi-

zations, along with government, must also proactively promote and communicate the social economy's contributions to their community.

Internal Organizational Development

The third key challenge facing the social economy in La Ronge is the shortage of financial and human resources, which limits organizational development and growth. These shortages limit the ability for some social economy organizations to maintain service levels, expand operations, and recruit trained and knowledgeable employees and volunteers. Financial constraints, for example, limit the activities of the Childcare Co-op and prevent the organization from taking on more children, even though the demand for its services continues to grow:

We really need a bigger infants centre. We only have three spots and there's a big waiting list for that room. We need one for nine more infants. And you need one staff for three infants.

The Childcare Co-op finds itself in a difficult position; increasing its rates could render its services unaffordable for many of its current and potential members.

In addition, some organizations have difficulty finding employees. Social economy organizations must compete, not only with each other, but with private and public institutions for employees, making it difficult to hire local residents as well as those from outside the community. The director of a local nonprofit organization discusses his experience with finding qualified employees:

Salary-wise, I can't compete with the reserve. If you are native and you work on the reserve, you don't have to pay taxes.... Some of the banks and credit unions have been hiring more aggressively. [And] why would you want to leave Saskatoon or Regina to come apprentice in La Ronge? You can stay closer to home and you will get the same education and the same training you would get up here.... With the increase in gas prices and travel, it makes it more difficult. Everything is a little more expensive in the North. Housing is a problem. We had a loans officer lined up [to come and work here] and he couldn't find suitable housing in his price range and a place that he was comfortable with, so that fell through.

Taken together, the cost of living in the North and stiff competition among local employers for skilled workers make it difficult for some social economy organizations to acquire skilled and knowledgeable employees.

For CED organizations, difficulties finding people with the required knowledge and skills stems not only from financial constraints; finding those with the required education, training, and experience can be difficult. Postsecondary institutions typically do not offer courses or programs centred on CED or social economy values. One CED practitioner explains:

I have a business degree. I don't remember doing any economic development or community type of training.... If we are not doing the training [in] school, we are hitting the ground running. The only way you are going to get that training is to work for an economic development agency. So if we could have a separate program set up for that, it would be good.

Furthermore, social economy organizations would also benefit if other professional groups such as lawyers, accountants, and bankers, better understood the nature, objectives, and values of nonprofits, co-operatives, and other socially and economically motivated organizations. Financial, accounting, and legal frameworks have a set of inherent values, some of which may be irrelevant or even detrimental to social economy organizations, especially Aboriginal ones (Quarter, Mook, and Richmond 2003; Findlay and Russell 2005).

Finally, social economy organizations in La Ronge are facing significant challenges to building leadership capacity in their organizations. To be sure, there is a small yet fiercely dedicated group of individuals in La Ronge who work tirelessly to make their community a better place to live. They are board members, organizers, innovators, and committed individuals who often go beyond what is asked of them. And this core group of individuals is frequently called upon to do even more. According to one interviewee, "With things like the Arts Council, or certain organizations that are attempting to provide quality-of-life services for people, it's always the same group of people that are extending themselves, whether it is through school mechanisms or nonprofit groups." Speaking about the co-op sector specifically, one participant noted the need for more youth involvement:

All credit unions and co-ops are in that quandary of fifty-five-year-old, middle-class males, and you have this situation where you have to have some turnover.... Not many people in the community are putting themselves out there. I can think of only a handful of people under the age of thirty-five who are getting involved.

Dedicated community volunteers and leaders are often left feeling strained, burnt out, or overwhelmed by the demand for their time and energy. Understandably, this leads some volunteers to scale back their involvement or quit altogether, exacerbating an already dire need for volunteers and community leaders.

In summary, social economy organizations face significant challenges, including administrative, jurisdictional, and communicative barriers to collaboration; a lack of understanding and support from politicians, policy makers, and the general public; and funding and human resources shortages. Nonetheless, these challenges highlight opportunities to build upon the many successes of the social economy. Certainly, the co-operation and active involvement of governments and community members is required in order to address some of the challenges discussed above. To some extent, however, it is within the reach of social economy organizations to work with willing partners more frequently, communicate with one another in a more meaningful way, and educate the community about their organizations.

CONCLUSION

THIS CASE STUDY HAD THREE OBJECTIVES. First, it aimed to identify the social economy actors in the community of La Ronge. We described and discussed the mandate and activities of many social economy organizations throughout this work. The second objective was to document some of the ways in which the social economy contributes to the social, economic, and cultural well-being of the community. Social economy organizations promote local businesses and strengthen the local economy; enhance the educational and career opportunities for local residents and northerners in general; improve the health and safety of residents and visitors; work diligently to provide exciting recreational and entertainment activities to community members; promote and preserve the arts and Aboriginal culture, traditions, and knowledge; and create safe, diverse, and inclusive spaces for all members of the community.

The third objective was to identify the current challenges and opportunities confronting the social economy in La Ronge. Although the challenges are significant, they highlight the importance of partnership, communication, and collaboration among social economy actors, and the need to educate politicians, policy makers, and the public about the roles and the successes of the social economy in creating healthy communities. At the same time, this study demonstrated that the active participation of governments is required in order to address some of the challenges such as jurisdictional barriers or a lack of programs and funding targeted for social economy organizations.

Throughout its history, the community of La Ronge has experienced both great success and undeniable hardship. It has been a forgotten community as well as the focal point of great expectations. Social economy organizations in La Ronge were created to meet some of the community's most pressing needs. Although unco-ordinated and disjointed at times, the social economy in La Ronge has succeeded and survived because of its relevance to local residents and its capacity to meet the social, economic, and cultural needs of its clients, members, and community.

APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

25 July 2006

Dear X:

We are writing to request an hour of your time for an interview during the week of August 1st to 4th.

Why?

We are conducting a major research initiative on the role of various nonprofit and co-operative organizations in community economic development (CED). Among the communities we will be studying in the exploratory phase is the La Ronge area. As a recognized leader in the region, your frontline knowledge, experience, and insight would provide us with a unique and valuable perspective.

Project Overview

In this phase of the project, we are comparing the roles of social enterprises in community economic development across three settings: rural, urban, and northern.

Our two main research objectives are:

- to identify how some of the strengths, challenges, and successes of organizations compare and contrast across regional contexts
- to identify opportunities for learning and sharing innovations across regions

Who Is Involved?

There are three basic stakeholders in the longer-range research initiative:

1. *Membership-based community organizations* like yours, which may be able to:
 - learn from the experiences and innovative strategies of similar organizations in other regions who have dealt with similar challenges
 - find the research useful in making the case for your work with local policy makers and program administrators

2. *Members of the research community*, who want to:

- build a better understanding of the grassroots needs, challenges, and priorities of membership-based community organizations like yours
- build the base of evidence for the social and economic benefits that these organizations contribute to building strong communities

3. *Public policy makers*, interested in developing more supportive policy and programs for social enterprise and community economic development

Benefits of Participation

There are two main benefits to being involved:

1. We hope the findings generated by this research will be *useful* to all stakeholders. Our findings will be provided to you as they are available.
2. Your contribution will also help *set direction* for a major follow-up research project that will roll out over the next five years. This consultation will be an opportunity, therefore, to ensure:
 - the issues important to your membership and community are heard and reflected in our thinking and recommendations to policy-makers
 - your concerns are taken into account as future research priorities are set

I will be in touch soon to arrange a convenient interview time. We will be in the La Ronge area from August 1st to 4th and are very much looking forward to meeting you, if possible. You can reach Robert with any questions you may have and/or to arrange a time that works best for you.

Sincerely,

Robert Dobrohoczki
(La Ronge Co-ordinator)
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Linking, Learning, Leveraging: Social Enterprises, Knowledgeable Economies and Sustainable Communities — A joint initiative of the Community-University Institute for Social Research and the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan, with funding provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Exploring the Social Economy in Saskatchewan: Urban, Rural, and Northern* (part of a larger study titled *Linking, Learning, Leveraging: Social Enterprises, Knowledgeable Economies, and Sustainable Communities*). Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

Researchers: Kimberly Brown
Robert Dobrohoczki
Isobel Findlay (Principal Investigator)

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Purpose and Procedure: I would like to receive your responses to some questions about participation in the social economy or social economy organizations. This information will be gathered through e-mail or an in-person interview, which may be audiotaped for transcription if you agree. If you agree, we may take photographs or videotape for the use of the research project only. This research project is co-ordinated by the Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) and the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan, in partnership with other Canadian universities, and with various community and co-operative partner organizations. The research is funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the University of Saskatchewan has received substantial in-kind support from academic and community partner organizations.

The project will investigate how social economy enterprises help build more respectful relationships within communities, with the environment, and among stakeholders. Such relationships include not-for-profits, co-operatives, community economic development organizations, community-based organizations, and other voluntary-sector initiatives. The re-

searchers will look at five areas: social enterprise development; financing strategies for this development; governance of social economy enterprises; measuring and mapping the social economy; and developing policy frameworks for the social economy.

Your participation in this study is appreciated and completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time during this process should you feel uncomfortable or at risk. You should also feel free to decline to answer any particular question(s). Should you choose to withdraw from the study, no data pertaining to your participation will be retained.

Potential Risks: Because I collect your consent and your personal identity information in the sections below, there is some risk that your identity may not be entirely preserved. I will make every effort to preserve the confidentiality of your comments but you should be aware that controversial remarks, in the unlikely event they are associated with you, could have negative consequences for your relationships with others in your organization or co-operative community. I will try to ensure that your identity is protected in the ways described below. If for some reason I desire to quote you in some way that might reveal your identity, I will seek your permission beforehand.

Potential Benefits: Your participation in this research project is greatly appreciated. Your participation will help investigate how social economy enterprises help build more respectful relationships within communities, with the environment, and among stakeholders. Findings from this component of the research may help to make the social economy sector more responsive to the needs of its members, enhance the economic situation of communities across Canada, and help to inform policy decisions both within the sector and government.

Storage and Data: The transcripts and original audio recording of the interview, if one is made, will be securely stored at the Centre for the Study of Co-operatives under the care and administration of the project management team, and for a period of at least five years.

Confidentiality and Data Release: Your interview will be transcribed directly by a transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement. After your interview, and prior to any data being included in a final report, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts as you see fit. Interview transcripts will be seen only by the researchers connected with this project. In addition, key representatives from the stakeholder group, identified to the group in a clear and transparent manner, will be responsible for reading the final draft of the report to check it for accuracy.

The research conclusions will be published in a variety of formats, both print and electronic. These materials may be further used for purposes of conference presentations, or publication in academic journals or popular press. In these publications, the data will be reported in a manner that protects confidentiality and the anonymity of participants. Participants will be identified without names being used, giving minimal information (for example what region they are from or whether they are staff, board, management, member, etc.) if this information is relevant. Pseudonyms or composite profiles may be used to disguise identity further, if necessary. In principle, actual names will not be used; however, leaders whose

position involves speaking on behalf of the organization may be asked if certain comments they have made can be attributed to them by name in publications. Any communications of these results that has clear potential to compromise your public anonymity will not proceed without your approval.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. If you choose to withdraw from the study, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. You will be informed of any major changes that occur in the circumstances of this study or in the purpose and design of the research that may have a bearing on your decision to remain as a participant.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time.

This study was approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board on 13 July 2006. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office (306 966–2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

You may access results by contacting the Director, Centre for the Study of Co-operatives at (306) 966–8509.

Consent to Participate: I have read and understood the descriptions provided above. I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

(Name of Participant – please print)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Researcher(s))

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

The questions below are part of the semi-structured interview guide. Not all of the questions will be appropriate for every interview, nor is the list exhaustive, given the semi-structured interview approach, which allows the interviewer to probe the themes in more depth. However, these questions are an approximate guide for the kind of questions that will be asked.

History of Person and Organization — Questions will include the individual's personal experience and history concerning their relationship with the organization and other organizations in the social economy, as well as a historical overview of the organization, its purpose and mandate. If relevant, basic socio-economic information may be asked, including such things as age, gender, education level, income level, work experience, etc. Sample questions include:

1. Tell us about yourself. [questions may be about age, gender, income level, educational level, work experience, depending on relevance]
2. Tell us about this community. Is it part of a larger region? What are the boundaries of this region?
3. How did you become involved with this organization?
4. How were you involved with the community before and after your involvement with this organization? Were you involved with other organizations like this?
5. Tell us about the organization. What is its purpose? Its history?
6. What are, or you hope will be, the lasting contributions of your organization?

Linkages to Community — Questions will probe issues such as the linkages to other social economy organizations, players, and key individuals. The contributions to community and economy will also be explored in terms of social cohesion and social capital, trust and meaning, and pathways to membership. We will explore issues such as who or what type of individual gets involved in the social economy, and why, and what obstacles they face. Sample questions include:

7. How does your organization contribute to the community socially and economically?
8. What are some of the key innovations of your organization?
9. What sorts of crises has your organization faced? How did it deal with them?

10. What links do you have to other organizations in the community? [open-ended to start, but also meant to probe connections not normally associated with social economy such as trade associations, labour unions, political parties, etc.]
11. How are you linked? [e.g., money, staff, support, partnerships, collaborations, etc.]
12. Who do you see as key players at the community level?
13. Which organizations are the most important to you and why?
14. How many staff are employed/volunteer with your organization? How many board members? Is finding sufficient labour problematic?
15. How do people become involved with your organization? What kinds of people become involved?
16. How involved are your staff/employees/volunteers/members with the community?
17. Do staff/volunteers/members tend to be community minded before becoming involved with your organization?
18. How important are volunteers to your organization?
19. What is the biggest obstacle facing your staff/volunteers/members?

Policy and Borders Issues on the Social Economy (Market-State Relationships) — These questions explore the boundaries of the social economy and linkages with government agencies and policy makers, with the private, for-profit sector, as well as with the informal economy. The intention is to explore complementary and/or contradictory players in the first and second sectors and how they interact in the social economy with this organization and others, as well as key questions on obstacles they face and public policy issues. Sample questions include:

20. What is the biggest obstacle facing your organization?
21. Do you think links or networks to the community or other organizations like yours could be strengthened? If so, what obstacles stand in the way? What things facilitate these networks?
22. What are some of the factors holding your organization back?
23. What links do you have to government agencies? [civic, provincial, federal]
24. Are you helped or hindered by government agencies?
25. Does government policy [civic, provincial, federal] help your organization?
26. How important are volunteers to the economic well-being of your community? The informal economy [unpaid labour]?
27. What sort of organizations are there in the community, either formally or informally?
28. What links do you have with for-profit businesses or associations?
29. Does the private sector help or hinder your organization? Are they competition?

30. Do you think the private sector could do more for your organization/sector? If so, why do you think so?
31. Do you think the private sector could do more for the community? If so, why do you think they do not do so now?
32. How important is “community spirit” for your organization? For the economy?

Democracy — These questions explore the structure of the organization, its decision-making process, leadership, and organizational culture. It explores the role of democracy and democratic values in social economy organizations, including issues such as diversity, accessibility, and representation. Sample questions include:

33. Is your organization a good place to work?
34. What is the organization’s relationship with its workers? Clients?
35. How are decisions made in your organization?
36. How is conflict handled in your organization?
37. What is the role of leadership in your organization? Does it have strong leaders/founding members? Are they involved with other organizations?
38. How diverse is your organization? What groups of citizens/members/clients does your organization represent?
39. Is it hard to find board members? Volunteers? If so, what is the biggest obstacle?
40. How well attended are AGMs? Is it hard to achieve quorum for board meetings?
41. Is there a problem with burnout? High turnover? Retaining talent?
42. Is your board diverse? Does your board reflect the diversity of your membership?
43. Does your board have a clearly defined code of ethics?
44. Do you think your organization is democratic?
45. How important is democracy to your organization?
46. How do positive results for your members/clients/users affect the community?

Concluding Questions

47. Our project focuses on and explores how organizations like yours operate in community. How and why do you consider your organization to be part of this sector?
48. How is your organization run differently from a private sector organization, or is it run differently?
49. How is your organization run differently from a public sector organization, or is it run differently?
50. Are there any questions you would like us to ask about yourself or your organization, or questions you think we should be asking other individuals or organizations in our study?

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