

liiyuu-iinuu womens' perceptions of the Cree Hunters and Trappers Income Security Program (ISP)*



For her Master's project, Èva-Marie Nadon Legault has documented liiyuu-linuu (Cree) women's perceptions of the Cree Hunters and Trappers Income Security Program (ISP), as well as their concerns about its application.

This document presents an outline of the research showing the profound relationship of liiyuu-linuu women with the land and the perceived iniquities regarding ISP procedural requirements and its accessibility to elders and young people.

Conducted with the support of the Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association (CWEIA) and in cooperation with the Cree Hunters and Trappers Income Security Board (CHTISB), this research has highlighted the under-representation of liiyuu-linuu women in decision-making spheres in relation to land and resources management, as well as the improvements that could be made to the Program for a better reflection of the modern reality of liiyuu-linuu women.

*“ Although the involvement
of Indigenous women in environmental
issues is on the rise, tools and
programs for land governance rarely
consider their realities. ”*

(Nadon Legault, 2020 : 3)

* Since 2019, the name has been changed to
“Economic Security Program for Cree Hunters”.



Ignored knowledge

Although liiyuu-linuu women have a deep connection with the land, actively perpetuate traditional knowledge and practices, they were not consulted during the development of the ISP.

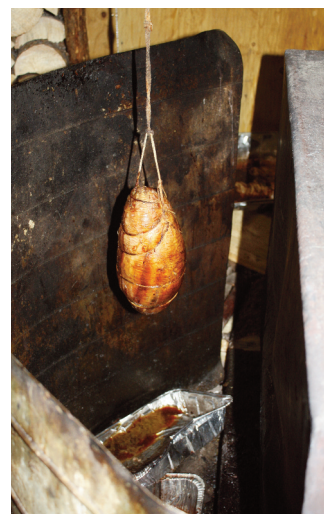
Initiated in 1975 as part of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA), the first modern treaty in Canada, the ISP provides a guaranteed income in compensation for the loss of land and resources to Crees who chose to maintain their traditional way of life.

Administered by the CHTISB, this unique program is the product of negotiations between Cree leaders and the government of Québec. However, liiyuu-linuu women were not consulted during its creation despite their hands-on knowledge of traditional life and the recognized complementarity of their role on the land. Even today, and despite local incentives, no specific mechanism ensures the participation of liiyuu-linuu women to public consultations.

To gather information of the perceptions of liiyuu-linuu women, 18 interviews and 3 discussion groups, with a total of 42 participants, were conducted in the Chisasibi, Mistissini, Waswanipi, Nemaska, Waskaganish, Washaw-Sibi communities and the city of Senneterre between July 2017 and September 2018. The interview guide and the consent form have been developed in cooperation with the CWEIA and the CHTISB.

The research results show that the activities of liiyuu-linuu women are essential and that *“many liiyuu-linuu women practice trapping, fishing and even big game hunting.”*

(Nadon Legault, 2020: 80)



Whiffs of colonialism

The Cree Nation is no longer subject to the Indian Act since the signing of the JBNQA, but traces of colonialism seem to be perpetuated in the implementation of programs, particularly with regard to Indigenous women and their relationship to the land.

The ISP is essentially based on the activities of the male “head of the family” as indicated in its main eligibility criteria. The liiyuu-linuu women want to have the criteria reviewed, especially in relation to their traditional practices and marital status.

The activities commonly practiced by women, such as harvesting, handicrafts, preparing game meat and net making, are considered as “related activities” by the CHTISB. This is a gendered division of work, all the more so that some liiyuu-linuu women have stated that the income generated by their participation to crafting activities or knowledge transmission could entail a reduction in their ISP benefits, which is seemingly contradictory to the program’s fundamental objectives. The invisibility of women’s knowledge has direct consequences: it limits their participation to land management and decision-making.



“The results show that the ISP eligibility criteria, whereby the beneficiary must be the head of the family, constrain women into choosing between their own interest and that of their spouse.” (Nadon Legault, 2020: 81)

Land, identity, equity...

} For liiyuu-linuu women, the land is a place of transmission, healing, spiritual renewal... even a referent of identity.

Even with program adjustments made throughout the years (maternity leaves, for example), the ISP is fundamentally based on the activities of the male head of family, leading to inequalities in the processing of program application requests.

The majority of liiyuu-linuu women we met teach traditional knowledge on the land and are concerned by the precarious status of elders and the place of young people within the ISP. They have also mentioned the necessity of establishing support measures to encourage youth to accompany elders on the land, of

recognising activities of knowledge transmission in the communities and standardizing the ISP application rules.

The liiyuu-linuu women want to hold an equitable place in decision-making circles. They are asking to be systematically consulted on issues of governance, land management, including the ISP, while requesting shorter waiting periods for payment of benefits in order to improve access to the land.

“ We can communicate with the environment. We need to [re]learn how to do it. (...)

This is why the transmission of this traditional knowledge to young people is so important (...)

And the way of life given to us, the culture, that is our medicine ”

(liiyuu-linuu woman, I12)

Photos : CHTISB

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To obtain the thesis (in French only): <https://depositum.uqat.ca/id/eprint/1232>

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