16 Agricultural and forestry entrepreneurship: learning from the experience of an Aboriginal community in Canada

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In the early 1990s, the Aboriginal community of Mashteuiatsh (Québec, Canada) opted for a model of community entrepreneurship to support its economic development. The results point towards the key role played by the community to facilitate entrepreneurial initiatives in the forestry sector. The public businesses created by the Band Council, during the early stage of development, offered knowledge and experience to the workers who have become today's entrepreneurs. Moreover, the Band Council instituted a supportive environment for new firms and has been an effective business incubator. We believe that the Mashteuiatsh model of development presented in our study is transferable, at least at some level, to other Aboriginal communities throughout the world. Mashteuiatsh, like many forest-dependent communities, is also connected within a region characterized by a significant farm-based economy. The similarities and functional proximity between these sectors suggest that our observations in Mashteuiatsh are likely to be transferable from forest- to farm-based communities.

INTRODUCTION

There exists a close relationship between the agricultural and forestry sectors, whether it occurs in Canada or in Europe. Indeed, the European Commission has recognized that "agriculture and forestry are the main land users and play a key role in the management of natural resources in rural areas and in determining the rural landscape" (European Communities 1995–2009).

Moreover, forest entrepreneurs have historically emerged from the agriculture sector (Mercure 1996; MacDonald and Clow 1999; ENFE 2000; Legendre 2005), and agricultural households are often engaged in forestry (Eikeland and Lie 1999; Penttinen et al. 2009). Even today, forestry and

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agricultural entrepreneurs in many countries share common associations or organizations. This is the case, for example, in France, where all land management entrepreneurs are represented by the Mouvement des Entrepreneurs de Services Agricoles, Forestiers et Ruraux (2009). Agricultural and forestry sectors have also experienced a similar industrial revolution; where changes have been made to increase profits and productivity and to decrease production costs. The intense process of mechanization that took place in agriculture slightly preceded the changes that occurred in the forestry sector (Blombäck et al. 2003; Penttinen et al. 2009). The more difficult working environment (topography, distance, and so on) which formed a greater challenge may serve to explain this delay. Nevertheless, technology permitting, rapid changes took place in the forest, and they are well described by MacDonald and Clow (1999, p. 324):

> By the late 1950s the one-man chainsaw had changed woodswork, but tree harvesting was still a matter of large crews of men with (powered) hand tools cutting down, delimbing, and slashing trees into lengths that were then removed (yarded) from the stump to roadside, literally by horsepower. Twenty years later the horse was a memory and men in the woods with chainsaws were rare. Woodswork was done by a relative handful of men who drove and operated tree harvesting machines.

Today, both sectors are characterized by specialization of production, increase in business size and introduction of new techniques or technologies (Ilbery 1991; MacDonald and Clow 1999; Legendre 2005; CAAAQ 2008).

As a result of the profound changes that have occurred since industrialization, agriculture and forestry now face similar issues. Development and intensification of operation has generated environmental problems like soil erosion, water pollution and natural habitats destruction. Thus, environmental problems, awakening public concern for sustainable development and public pressure for more environmental practices, have led to policy reforms in many countries. Inevitably, new public policies have had operational consequences for farm-based or forestry-based entrepreneurs.

Profound changes in the environment, more specifically economic instability, also gave prominence to the fact that dependency is a threat for farm-based or forestry-based communities. For farmers, diversification was a strategic choice (Alsos and Carter 2006). Alsos et al. (2003) assert that entrepreneurship is part of European agricultural policies as farm resources can be utilized in entrepreneurial activities to increase economic activity in the region. In a study on forest-dependent communities, Bouthillier et al. (2000) assert that, in recent decades, the important loss of direct and indirect jobs in the forest sector has created an urgent need

for economic diversification of communities living essentially or mainly from this sector. The same conclusion also holds true in the European forest community where: "the drop in employment in the forestry sector will have a severe effect on employment in rural regions. [. . .] There is however a political will to counter this development by launching strategies for diversification of economic and social activity in the rural areas and by increasing forest use through developing entrepreneurial skills" (Blombäck et al. 2003, p. 21).

Thus, both sectors face similar challenges: they need to develop entrepreneurial behaviour as a strategy to rapidly adapt to new market conditions and to favour a more robust regional economy (Alsos et al. 2003; Blombäck et al. 2003; Mäkinen and Selby 2006; CAAAQ 2008; LeBel and Norin 2007; Nybakk and Hansen 2008; Clark 2009). This is especially true for a great number of communities that depend upon these sectors. However, there are many different set of environments, including different stresses and pressures, in which communities can develop (Chaskin 2001; Beckley et al. 2008). Therefore, responses (that is entrepreneurial activity) may be quite different from one community to another. According to Peredo and Christman (2006), researchers have dedicated efforts to understand how social networks contribute to entrepreneurial success. They also argued that "what needs further consideration, however, is the extent to which communities themselves, as collective units, may function as entrepreneurs and enterprises and may benefit in those functions from the social capital at their disposal" (2006, p. 315).

To answer this question, this chapter presents a model of community entrepreneurship developed in the Aboriginal community of Mashteuiatsh (Québec, Canada) in the forestry sector. In addition, the need to develop entrepreneurial behaviour is even more acute for Aboriginal communities (Peredo et al. 2004). Historically, in Canada, they have been excluded from economic participation in primary sectors like forestry, which has led to a developmental divide between Aboriginal and other communities. Today, promotion of entrepreneurship has received considerable attention as a means to control their socio-economic development. Many barriers faced by Aboriginal entrepreneurs, such as financial needs and inexperience, can be compared to the challenge of farm start-up. A favourable environment must therefore be created for entrepreneurial behaviours to emerge and take hold.

This chapter will continue with an introduction of the community-based entrepreneurship concept and a brief description of the research methodology used. The results obtained from our work in a Canadian Aboriginal community actively involved in developing entrepreneurship are then presented. A discussion concludes this chapter.

COMMUNITY-BASED ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurship is a relatively young field of academic research (Cooper 2003). At first, research in entrepreneurship focused on the study of the "traits" and personality of individuals and then shifted to a more behavioural and cognitive approach (Acs and Audretsch 2003; Cooper 2003). For example, the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991) states that all behaviour that requires a certain degree of planning may be predicted by the intention of having this behaviour. Shapero and Sokol (1982) applied this approach in the field of entrepreneurship, referred to as the "Entrepreneurial Event Model". According to Shapero and Sokol's model, the decision to start a business is a function of the individual's perception of the desirability and the feasibility of the behaviour in question (Krueger and Carsrud 1993). Thus, many efforts have been made to understand the importance of social context to entrepreneurs. For example, Morten (1993) demonstrates that networking activities may stimulate business creation. For their part, Johannisson and Nilsson (1989) and Selsky and Smith (1994) investigate the contribution of community leaders, called community entrepreneurs, to promote entrepreneurial actions within the community. Still, research in the field of entrepreneurship has mainly assumed that entrepreneurial initiatives were the result of an individual's actions (Peredo and Chrisman 2006).

Shane and Venkataraman (2000) were precursors to the enlargement of the entrepreneurship concept toward a more collective approach. By stating that entrepreneurship involves the study of "the processes of discovery, evaluation, and exploitation of opportunities; and the set of individuals who discover, evaluate, and exploit them", they introduced the idea that entrepreneurship may also be undertaken collectively. Peredo and Chrisman (2006, p. 310) developed the concept of community-based enterprise. The concept is defined as "a community acting corporately as both entrepreneur and enterprise in pursuit of common good". Thus, community-based entrepreneurship is a situation where a community engages in the process of discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities.

Therefore, to understand how communities can organize to support entrepreneurial actions, it is important to define what a community is. Hillery's research (1955) investigates different definitions of community. Based on his work, we consider that a community is characterized by: (1) a group of people inhabiting a limited area, (2) a specific social network within a particular group and (3) a sense of self-identification. Thus, a community can be defined in terms of its geographical delimitation, including the inventory of inhabitants and infrastructures. Furthermore,

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a community may be defined in terms of its social characteristics and attributes. Lastly, a sense of self-identification is also important because social ties may extend beyond administrative boundaries (Carroll 1995). For example, Aboriginal entrepreneurs may live outside the community limits and operate a business within the community (Beaudoin et al. 2009); implying that social networks extend beyond community limits. Therefore, the Mashteuiatsh case study on which this chapter is based presents an example of community identity (forest entrepreneurs) forming part of a cultural community (Innu Nation) which is localized within geographical boundaries (Mashteuiatsh). Moreover, it should be known that Aboriginal communities in Canada have a distinct legal status.

Thus, communities do rely on different assets to initiate entrepreneurial actions: "social capital (the will and ability of people to mobilize resources and work together), human capital (the education, job experience, acquired skills, health and mobility of individuals), and infrastructure that supports the economic and social activities of the community, and natural resources or natural capital as the goods and services delivered by the natural world that affect community well-being" (Beckley et al. 2002, p. 663). These assets define what is known as community capacity: the community's ability to respond to external and internal stresses; to discover, analyse and exploit opportunities; and to meet community needs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our study in the Mashteuiatsh community focused on forest entrepreneurs (hereafter named Ilnu entrepreneurs). Thirteen entrepreneurs were identified with the help of a local economic development organization, the Mashteuiatsh SDEI (Société de développement économique ilnu). Table 16.1 shows the profile of the Ilnu entrepreneurs. During the spring and winter of 2008, we met with Ilnu entrepreneurs to fill out a questionnaire composed of 92 questions, mostly closed-ended. We sought to better understand their goals and motivations, entrepreneurial history, their company, their management practices, and their business network.

The second step was to conduct semi-structured interviews with Ilnu entrepreneurs, as well as with the community's economic development organization, the Band Council and the Ilnu entrepreneurs' main clients. In addition to the questionnaire themes previously mentioned, the interviewer covered themes like business opportunities, community support and obstacles to starting up a business. These interviews lasted between sixty and ninety minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Then, the NVivo 8 software was used to codify the information

Table 16.1 Profile of the Mashteuiatsh Ilnu forest entrepreneurs

Characteristics	Results	n
Sex		
Male	92%	12
Female	8%	1
Age		
Median (years)	43	13
Years of schooling		
Median (years)	11	13
Age at business start-up		
Median (years)	38	13
Main business activities[1]		
Reforestation[2]	33%	4
Transportation	25%	3
Harvesting[3]	17%	2
Road systems	8%	1
Inventory	8%	1
Training	8%	1

Notes:

1 The community of Mashteuiatsh is home to 12 forestry businesses, owned by the 13 Ilnu entrepreneurs.

2 Reforestation includes planting, clearing, pre-commercial thinning, and scarification activities.

3 One of the two harvesting businesses offers an alternative business model to the conventional one in the forest sector. The company subcontracts its 5000 m^3 (estimation) harvested volume. The owners made this decision to strike a balance between the territory's different activities (logging, ethno-tourism, hunting, and trapping) and therefore keep control over their trapping grounds.

deemed "important". Finally, interpretation techniques like looking for "patterns", contrast, comparison, and counting (Miles and Huberman 1994). The purpose of the interviews was to improve our understanding of certain elements deemed important, validate, and enrich the data collected from the questionnaire. The main results of this research were presented in the Mashteuiatsh community, notably for validation purposes.

MASHTEUIATSH ILNU COMMUNITY

In the province of Québec, the Innu nation numbers nine Aboriginal communities. The Mashteuiatsh Ilnu1 community is located on the western shore of Lac-Saint-Jean. Their traditional territory is called Nitassinan and covers around 92 200 km2 (see Figure 16.1). The Mashteuiatsh Ilnu

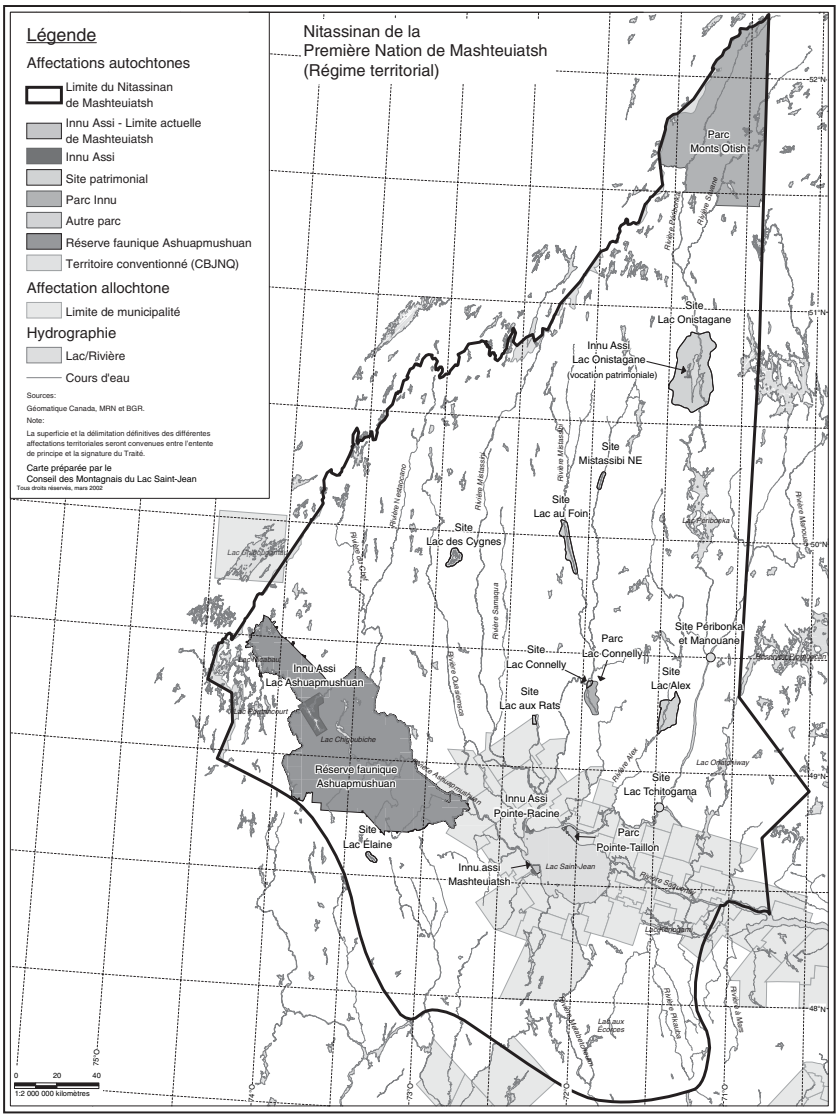


Figure 16.1 *Map of the* Nitassinan *of the Mashteuiatsh First Nation (prepared by the Conseil des Montagnais du Lac-Saint-Jean, 2002)*

community has 4958 members, 2029 members of which live within the reserve boundaries (INAC 2009). According to Statistics Canada data (2006), 38 per cent of the community population is under 25 years old and 52 per cent is under 35. Comparatively, 29 per cent of Québec's population is under 25 years old and 45 per cent is under 35. The people in Mashteuiatsh still practice many traditional land uses on the Nitassinan like hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering for subsistence, ritual and social purposes (Conseil Tribal Mamuitun 2004).

The Native Museum of Mashteuiatsh guidebook (Musée amérindien de Mashteuiatsh 2008, p. 51) indicates that "in the 1950s, Mashteuiatsh was home to several businesses, for example, a grocery store, a convenience store, a fur enterprise, a restaurant, and so on. Visitors from the USA came for fishing expeditions and employed guides from the community. In the 1980s, the Conseil des Montagnais du Lac-Saint-Jean (CMLSJ), which is the community Band Council, took charge of all services offered to the population (education, social services, and so on). The CMLSJ then decided to withdraw from the residential building sector; with entrepreneurs from the community taking over this sector. As a result, there have been many business start-ups in the construction sector. Still in the 1980s, the Band Council acquired more businesses: a factory making camping goods and snowshoes. The CMLSJ also obtained government rights (a licence) to commercially harvest wood on the land and funded a sawmill. The goal behind these business acquisitions by the CMLSJ was to reinforce the community through job creation and greater economic independence. At the end of that early economic development phase, forestry was still a relatively minor provider of jobs in the community.

The following excerpt from the briefs presented by the Conseil Tribal Mamuitun mak Nutashkuan (2004, p. 31) at the Commission for the Study of Public Forest Management in Québec, well reflects the importance of the forest sector for the Mashteuiatsh community: "Forest management activities are a development asset of great importance for the Mashteuiatsh community because of the land connexion and the abundance of young workforce. Jobs creation in this sector is a priority in order to increase socioeconomic conditions for the community."

In the early 1990s, the Band Council consulted Mashteuiatsh residents in order to revise its economic development plan. In the past, the Council had played a major economic role (Bherer et al. 1989), but certain public initiatives had faced economic difficulties One respondent, who has long been involved in his community's economic development explained:

> When I first got involved in economic development, we were dealing mostly with Band-owned businesses like the sawmill, La Plume Blanche (which was

> a campground), and the Council's snowshoe factory. These organizations just weren't profitable. The Council was often criticized for competing with private enterprise.[2]

One of the consultation's underlying issues was to decide whether economic development should be based on the public or private sector. Eventually, the Council decided to let community forces (that is, entrepreneurs) gradually take charge of the development of various economic sectors. Moreover, the Council decided to privatize the businesses it still managed. In addition to the factory jobs, the sawmill provided jobs through the factory, but also through roadwork, transportation, and harvesting operations. Thus, selling the sawmill in 1992 led to the creation of the first private-owned forest-dependent business in the community; it was transferred to a community member who was doing the road maintenance, transportation and harvesting operations. For a decade, first as a worker then as a manager, this person gained the experience and expertise he would later need to develop and succeed as an entrepreneur in the forest sector.

Then, in the early 1990s, the CMLSJ founded a forestry services business to seize opportunities in this growing activity sector. This was a move that went against the CMLSJ's political agenda to withdraw from direct business operations. The Council felt that no entrepreneurs at this time were available to take over the challenge. The public business did pre-commercial thinning, hydro power line maintenance and inventory contracts (Conseil Tribal Mamuitun 2004). Later on, forest planning was added to the services offered. It was seen as a strategic sector in which the community wanted to be active

In December 2000, the SDEI was created to further support the economic development of the community (Musée amérindien de Mashteuiatsh 2008; SDEI 2009). The SDEI was especially active in assisting entrepreneurs. Mashteuiatsh Ilnu forest entrepreneurs do represent the first generation of forest entrepreneurs in the community. Therefore, there was a need for such support. The unfortunate experience of one respondent well expressed this need:

> For contracts, we knew little about the logging industry, harvesting I mean. We didn't have the best contracts. Case in point, the first year we did not get the subsidized rate for our fuel, we paid around $1 a litre, while everyone else in the industry had a fixed rate of about 50–55 cents a litre. So if gas went up to $1.20, the others were frozen at 55 cents and we paid $1.20.

The SDEI helps community members develop their business project, notably by assisting the entrepreneurs in elaborating their business plan

or finding funds. Among other things, it possesses a loan guarantee programme. It is important to understand that under the Indian Act, Aboriginal property cannot be seized. Therefore, financial institutions are sometimes hesitant to lend money to Aboriginals. Young entrepreneurs, regardless of ethnicity, often have difficulty obtaining a loan. For an Aboriginal, the legal status can be just one more hurdle. The financial support developed by the SDEI helps entrepreneurs borrow the funds they need to start their businesses. Moreover, the SDEI's personnel can even target potential entrepreneurs in the community when opportunities present themselves. In this regard, one respondent said:

> When ministries or lenders receive projects, they call us and ask, "Do you know [this company]?" We have a tremendous amount of influence, although people don't know it. We can call a guy and say, "Take this file." It's our contact network that develops this level of influence.

In 2003, the CMLSJ also created the Développement Piekuakami Ilnuatsh (DPI), an organization acting as a general entrepreneur or job dispatcher for the CMLSJ. DPI is in charge of negotiating contracts with large companies operating in the natural resources sector (Musée amérindien de Mashteuiatsh 2008). DPI also redistributes contracts negotiated at the joint committee. One respondent, involved in DPI, gave the following explanation:

> DPI's mission is to manage contracts owned by the Council [. . .] When DPI secures a contract, the organization then reallocates it to an entrepreneur who has the resources to fulfil it. Of course, DPI's services are one of support. Because if the business is having difficulty, DPI will help by searching for funds and providing financial guarantees, and facilitating contacts with a large forest company. DPI offers these kinds of services to help the business succeed.

Also in 2003, feeling that it was now possible to find entrepreneurs to take over management of forestry services, the CMLSJ decided to privatize the business. It is believed that this action led to many business start-ups in the forest sector (Conseil Tribal Mamuitun 2004). One former manager of the forestry services business, who went through the privatization process said:

> I was working for the Band council at the time it was decided to privatize the forest sector. We gave the opportunities to the people involved in the forestry services business to create their own company. [. . .] We talked to the employees when we announced the company was closing down, and we said to those interested in getting organized and structuring themselves: you've worked in this business for a while and you now have a great opportunity.

The same respondent asserted that at least three entrepreneurs directly benefitted from the Council's former contracts to create their business. Two other entrepreneurs took advantage of former Council contracts and created a worker cooperative in 2003. However, the co-op ceased its activities in 2005 and the two founders started their own forest businesses. These two workers also had gained experience and expertise in the forest sector by working for the community enterprise.

In 2004, the SDEI revised its strategic plan and identified the forest sector development as a priority. The SDEI invested special efforts in increasing "the quantity and the quality of goods, services and resources in the forest sector in order to generate significant economic benefits for the community" (SDEI 2009). The organization set up a Project Management Office designed for forestry specifically aimed at supporting and assisting the community's forestry entrepreneurs.

Finally, it should be added that the CMLSJ's workforce development sector has favoured partnerships with Ilnu forest entrepreneurs for many years, in order to train and employ Mashteuiatsh's Aboriginal workers (DMO 2009). For example, more than twenty persons received a four-week planting training in 2007. In addition, in 2009, ten persons received a training of 25 weeks in planting, clearing and logging. The CMLSJ also developed a project for the Canadian Model Forest Network with two other non-Aboriginal communities (FMLSJ 2009). The Lac-Saint-Jean model forest was created in 2008. The goal of the project was to sustain and develop the local forest environment economy and to promote collective expertise (ibid.).

CONCLUSIONS

Even if Mashteuiatsh appears to have shifted to an individual-based entrepreneurial model by privatizing its public forest, the community does represent an interesting model of community-based entrepreneurship; a concept defined as "a community acting corporately as both entrepreneur and enterprise in pursuit of common good" (Pedero and Chrisman 2006, p. 310). These authors' definition seems to be an adequate description of the entrepreneurial development process that occurred in the forest sector at Masteuiatsh. The CMLSJ played a significant role through the creation of public companies, in order to create jobs for as many people as possible and to reinforce the community (Musée amérindien de Mashteuiatsh 2008, p. 51). In fact, the CMLSJ acted as an effective incubator of aboriginal forest entrepreneurs. According to Hannon and Chaplin (2003), "The notion of an incubator has emerged from combining the demand for flexible space

with the need for a supportive business environment within which new and young firms can be nurtured through start-up and achieve accelerated development". At first, the community members did not have experience in the forest sector, but workers had the opportunity to develop their experience and knowledge within public companies. Thus, workers acquired the perception that creating and managing a forest-dependent business was feasible. Then, when opportunities appeared through the privatization of CMLSJ's businesses, they opted-in the entrepreneurial process.

Moreover, Mashteuiatsh adopted a capacity-building approach. First, the CMLSJ gained access to the territory and its forest resources. This was a premise for the creation of its sawmill. Then, regarding human capital, we previously explained that CMLSJ's businesses offered job experience and allowed the Mashteuiatsh Ilnu forest entrepreneurs to acquire skills and self-confidence. In addition, the CMLSJ invested a great deal of effort in educating, training and employing its people. Finally, as for social capital, it appears that the Mashteuiatsh Ilnu forest entrepreneurs could count on an effective social network within the community. Formal institutions (SDEI, DPI and a joint committee CMLSJ-Industry) allowed Ilnu forest entrepreneurs, CMLSJ representatives and non-Aboriginal partners to benefit from a collective synergy.

This chapter provides some insight into what kind of prerequisite communities may require to give entrepreneurs flexibility and support for experimenting and attempting new initiatives, individually or collectively. Above all, it is necessary for entrepreneurs to rely on a supportive environment. Thus, local governments need to engage in a capacity building process, fostering social and human capital to generate wealth from natural assets in a sustainable way. When the risk of business creation is perceived to be too high by individuals, community based-entrepreneurship may be an alternative; either as a permanent solution or, like Mashteuiatsh did, as a transition process. At least one Aboriginal community in Québec, namely Essipit First Nation, has, so far, based all its economic development on the communal approach. A formal comparison of these two models seems worthy of further research.

Finally, this study has described how a community can act collectively, either in an entrepreneurial manner by creating enterprises or in a supportive manner by setting up institutions that may benefit community members. While conventional models of entrepreneurship mainly focused on individuals, one important contribution of this study is to show the usefulness of considering communal entrepreneurship in this type of setting. As Peredo and Chrisman (2006) assert, community-based approaches appear to be a promising strategy for fostering entrepreneurial activities that occur in communities, including rural and aboriginal communities.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

For practitioners such as farm owners/producers and agencies aiming at business support or regional development, we believe that our study provides an argument favouring a thoughtful community-driven strategy to support entrepreneurial activities. Distinctive characteristics at the local level can be taken into account and improve the probability of success. Thus, governments can play a positive role by offering flexible political answers to communities seeking support in their quest for greater economic autonomy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank all the participants to this study, particularly the Mashteuiatsh Ilnu forest entrepreneurs. We also thank the Forêt modèle du Lac-Saint-Jean, the FQRSC, the Programme de Recherche sur les Entrepreneurs de Récolte et de Transport (PREFORT) and NRCAN/NSERC/SSHRC for the support and assistance provided.

NOTES

1. In Quebec, the term "Innu" is used when referring to the Innu Nation in general or its communities like Betsiamites, Essipit, Nutashkuan or Mingan . However, the term "Ilnu" is specific to the Mashteuiatsh community. It refers to an ancient usage which is preserved in the Mashteuiatsh dialect (Boucher 2008).
2. All interviews were conducted in French. Excerpts presented in this chapter have been translated by the authors.

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