

Linking Skills to Employment in Inuit Nunangat



A mixed economy is critical to livelihoods in Inuit Nunangat. This means both market- and traditional land-based activities are important.

Economic opportunities in the region can benefit from Inuit skillsets, strengths, and knowledge. And Inuit have told us they are interested in finding a balance between market participation and traditional land-based activities. Our research will provide insights to help Northern economies grow and support sustainable livelihoods.

Inuit skills can strengthen northern economies

“Value” is more than money or the exchange of goods through a market economy. It rests in the connection between skills, knowledges, assets, strengths, and communities—[people’s social, cultural, natural, and economic capital](#). The traditional skills found in Inuit Nunangat add value to Northern communities beyond money; there’s more to making a living than making money.

The economic opportunities currently available in Inuit Nunangat are not balanced. They offer wages, but don’t reflect Inuit social and cultural values. This is compounded by the lack of diverse market-based opportunities. Specifically, Inuit labour is concentrated in public administration, health and social services, and education.¹

To help Inuit capitalize on the potential opportunities, we need to understand where their current strengths and skills overlap with the market-based economy. Arts and environmental conservation are two sectors that could enable Inuit to build sustainable livelihoods compatible with their cultural values, knowledge, and skills.

Why is a mixed economy important?

Market-based activities include work for wages or business income. Land-based activities include things like hunting and harvesting country food. They create social and cultural resources that have traditionally not been tied to the exchange of goods or services for money. Traditional land-based activities across Inuit Nunangat:

- provide food, clothing, and tools:
- strengthen social inclusion and nurture cultural traditions and languages:
- strengthen the identities and self-determination of Inuit:
- strengthen Inuit ties to the land.

Finding balance

Inuit want diverse opportunities in their communities that strengthen social resources and expand on existing cultural knowledge and traditional skillsets.² And they want to see their values reflected in the sectors that dominate Northern GDP. Without a balanced economy, it is difficult for Inuit to find opportunities for a sustainable livelihood.

A sustainable livelihood is a way of life that fulfills a person’s long-term material and socio-cultural needs. It includes the skills, physical and social resources, and activities that allow people to meet their needs—material, community, and cultural. Sustainable livelihood models can promote inclusive growth, helping entire communities prosper.

Finding gaps

The resource and public sectors offer wage opportunities for Inuit Nunangat. But employers across these sectors struggle to meet their Inuit employment targets. At the same time, persistent gaps in education, employment, and income leave Inuit economically vulnerable.

¹ P. Arriagada and A. Bleakney, *Inuit Participation in the Wage and Land-Based Economies in Inuit Nunangat: Aboriginal Peoples Survey*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-653-X2019003 (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, June 2019).

² Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *Inuit Perspectives on a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy* (Ottawa: ITK, January 2018), accessed on April 1, 2021.

Focus on strengths

Past research looked at what's missing. We're looking at what's being missed. By focusing on strengths and skills that already exist in Inuit Nunangat, we can link them to opportunities in the market economy and key sectors that may better reflect Inuit values and visions of sustainable livelihoods in the North.

Potential and promise

Arts

Art plays an important role for Inuit, both culturally and economically, relying on skills and traditions that have sustained Inuit culture for millennia. Research suggests that about a quarter of Inuit over the age of 15 are engaged in the arts and crafts economy, accounting for over 2,700 full-time equivalent jobs and more than \$87.2 million to Canadian GDP.³

Conservation

The conservation sector comprises a growing range of activities including harvesting and country food processing. Although more research is needed to determine labour market and GDP impacts, we know that about 84 per cent of Inuit across Inuit Nunangat participate in some form of these activities for sustenance or income.⁴

What's next

This research will help us understand the skillsets available across Inuit Nunangat. Inuit insights can reveal areas for opportunity creation. And Inuit skills applied to the market economy will promote sustainable livelihoods and improve living standards.

We're looking forward to several exciting outcomes from this project:

- a rich, descriptive review of community perspectives on the four interrelated sources of value (economic, social, ecological, and cultural).
- community voices regarding how these sources of value can best be used to help create sustainable livelihoods.
- an analysis of existing change agents and current opportunities identified by community leaders.
- identification of areas that can be supported to help Inuit capitalize on emerging opportunities.

³ Big River Analytics, "Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy." Crown-Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Government of Canada. Last modified on July 12, 2017.

⁴ Arriagada and A. Bleakney, Inuit Participation in the Wage and Land-Based Economies in Inuit Nunangat.

Two sectors that show promise

Arts

- t.v. and film
- crafts
- performing arts
- new media and photography
- literary arts
- carvings and prints



Conservation

- environmental monitoring
- management and sustainable resource use
- remediation
- harvesting and value-added food processing
- ecotourism
- research

