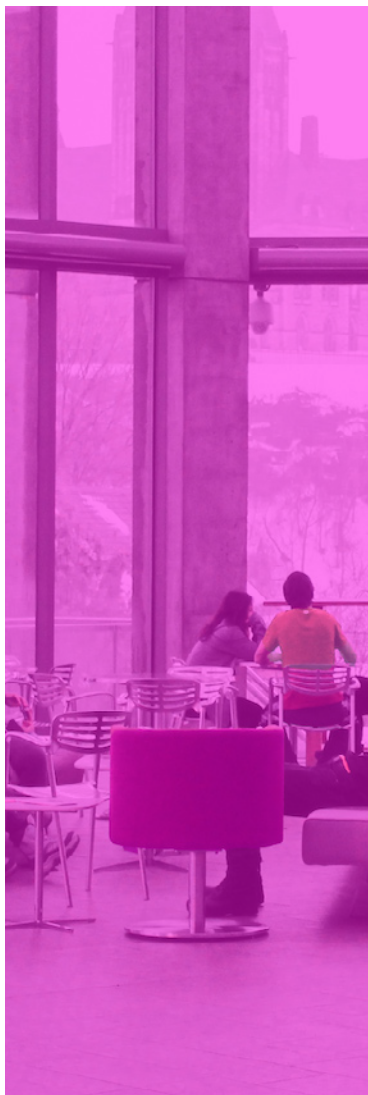


Values, Knowledge, and Vision

How Inuit Skills Can Strengthen Northern Economies





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Highlights

- Inuit want employment and business opportunities that reflect their values, traditional knowledge, and community-based strengths.
- The arts and conservation economies are both promising sectors where Inuit values, traditional knowledge, and strengths can thrive.
- These sectors have the potential to empower Inuit knowledge, craftsmanship, and ingenuity by building on and adapting skills that have sustained Inuit culture for millennia.
- The Inuit arts economy has a strong foundation, but also untapped potential. Cooperatives and social media platforms continue to open new opportunities, while unreliable Internet and cell connectivity and a lack of marketing and e-commerce training are obstacles to equitable market access.
- Inuit land-based skills and practices have a pivotal role to play in emerging conservation sector activities. These include environmental monitoring, resource stewardship, ecotourism, and climate change research.
- Inuit land-based activities also have untapped potential to strengthen local food security and sustainable livelihoods in Inuit Nunangat. While such activities can be difficult to monetize, emerging markets for traditional Inuit goods such as country foods and crafts have the potential to grow Northern economies while respecting Inuit values and community needs.



Overview

The relationship between the wage economy and the traditional land-based economy in Inuit Nunangat is complex—as is Inuit participation in both. Traditional land-based activities such as hunting and harvesting are integral to community food security and cultural continuity, but the ways in which Inuit experience and earn these livelihoods continue to evolve.

Many Inuit view participation in the wage economy as necessary for making a living in contemporary Inuit Nunangat. The wage economy in Inuit Nunangat relies heavily on the public sector, construction, and mining. In 2017, 51 per cent of working-age Inuit in Nunavut worked for the federal, territorial, or municipal governments,¹ while across all Inuit Nunangat, 9.9 per cent work in the mining and construction industries.²

A Symbiotic Relationship

As part of a mixed economy, wage labour can help to cover the growing expense of land-based activities such as hunting and harvesting. The costs to purchase and maintain equipment like snowmobiles or hunting and fishing gear, as well as necessary protective clothing and other essential tools for land-based activities,

can be prohibitive.³ At the same time, some Inuit have sought to supplement their incomes through the sale of products reaped from land-based activities. These include country foods, arts, crafts, clothing, and implements. Others have applied their land-based skills to outfitting and ecotourism to support themselves and their communities.

Inuit participation in land-based activities continues to be high: In 2016, 85 per cent of working-age Inuit in Inuit Nunangat participated in at least one land-based activity, including hunting, harvesting, trapping, making clothing, and artwork.⁴ Twenty-seven per cent took part in these activities to supplement their income.⁵

1 Arriagada and Bleakney, *Inuit Participation*.

2 Ibid.

3 Schott and others, "Operationalizing Knowledge Coevolution."

4 Arriagada and Bleakney, *Inuit Participation*; Statistics Canada, *Labour Market Experiences of Inuit*.

5 Ibid.

In 2017, 38 per cent of working-age Inuit were not in the labour force.⁶ The reasons include caring for children or family members, attending a post-secondary institution, and health-related reasons. This also includes discouraged searchers (those who are willing and available to work but have stopped looking because few opportunities exist). In 2017, 30 per cent of working-age Inuit considered themselves discouraged searchers.⁷ While many Inuit have an interest in participating in the wage economy, there are multiple barriers to doing so, including few job opportunities and inadequate infrastructure to support employment and training facilities in the North.

Harvesting—Understated by Conventional Economics

Traditional land-based activities such as hunting and fishing help Inuit maintain traditional diets and reduce food costs. These activities are not typically accounted for in labour market analyses or measures of economic growth.⁸

A McGill University researcher recently estimated that Nunavut's country food harvest was equivalent to about \$143 million per year in market value in terms of nutritional replacement.⁹ That amounts to 8.1 per cent of the \$1.76 billion paid in wages and salaries in Nunavut in 2019.¹⁰ This demonstrates how the direct economic value of hunting and fishing is understated. As well, the broader social and cultural values associated with these activities are not being captured. Inuit communities are also partnering with university researchers to further evaluate the real costs per trip associated with Inuit participation in land-based activities and the relative social, cultural, and economic value of harvesting.¹¹

According to the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA), harvesting “reinvigorates Inuit leadership,” promotes traditional practices and the transmission of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit or IQ (see Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) Principles), and empowers community members.¹² Inuit also speak of harvesting's value in terms of community well-being and physical and mental health.



6 Arriagada and Bleakney, *Inuit Participation*.

7 Ibid.

8 Palesch, *Creating Opportunity in Inuit Nunangat*.

9 Based on a formula using publicly available information (average harvest per person and nutritional quality). Anselmi, “Researcher Puts a Dollar Figure on Nunavut's Country Food Harvest.”

10 Bernard and Beckman, Territorial Outlook Economic Forecast.

11 Schott and others, “Operationalizing Knowledge Coevolution.”

12 Qikiqtani Inuit Association, *Food Sovereignty and Harvesting*.

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) Principles

IQ principles¹³ are Inuit societal values that guide all aspects of social living. They are intended to be used across all sectors to guide respectful relationships, management practices, and governance.

- ᐃᑦᖅᓂᒋᔪᑦᏳ - *Inuuqatigiitsiarniq*
Respecting others, relationships, and caring
for people.
- ᑐᕙᓴᑦᏳ - *Tunnganarniq*
Fostering good spirit by being open,
welcoming, and inclusive.
- ᐱᔨᔭᑦᏳ - *Pijitsirniq*
Serving and providing for family and/
or community.
- ᐸᑯᑦᓂᒋᔪᑦᏳ - *Aajiiqatigiinni*
Decision-making through discussion
and consensus.
- ᐱᔭᓴᓴᑦᏳ - *Pilimmaksarniq*
Development of skills through observation,
mentoring, practice, and effort.
- ᐃᖃᑲᑦᓂᒋᔪᑦᏳ - *Ikajuqtigini*
Working together for a common cause.
- ᖃᓄᑦᑐᑦᏳ - *Qanuqtuurniq*
Being innovative and resourceful.
- ᐊᑦᓇᓂᑎᑦᓂᑦ ᖃᓴᔪᐊᑦᏳ -
Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq
Respect and care for the land, animals,
and the environment.

13 See, for example, Nunavut Department of Education, *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Education Framework*; Nunavut Impact Review Board, "Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit."

The Arts Sector

The arts is one sector of the market economy where Inuit traditional knowledge, strengths, and skills have direct applications.

Inuit have been creating arts and crafts for millennia, but the commercialization of Inuit art only began in the 1940s. A significant contemporary influence followed, as printmaking and modern materials were introduced and Inuit adapted their artistic strengths to accommodate techniques and materials that were novel to them.¹⁴ The contemporary Inuit arts economy includes visual and plastic arts such as carving, printmaking, and crafts; performing arts, including music, stage performance, and film and television; and multimedia, literature, and other forms of cultural production.

Inuit provide marketable goods and artistic services. New media provides an evolving outlet for creativity and communication and presents a global audience for Inuit expression. But even with the success experienced by some Inuit artisans, there is considerable room for growth in this sector.



14 Bentham, "Inuit Art."

Room for Growth

In 2017, about a quarter of Inuit over age 15 were engaged in the arts and crafts economy. This accounts for over 2,700 full-time equivalent jobs and more than \$87.2 million in GDP.¹⁵ Although a significant contribution, this equates to roughly \$32,300 annually for individuals living in areas that have the highest costs of living in Canada. It is also relatively small compared to the total GDP of Nunavut (\$3.1 billion in 2019).¹⁶

A lack of business acumen, financial and digital literacy, and networking opportunities/skills can create barriers for independent artists. Additionally, limited personal resources may restrict artisans' ability to purchase materials for their crafts, access additional training or education to further their mastery and develop new skills, or successfully market their products.

Pathways for Distribution and Access to Inuit Arts

Online Sales

There is a growing trend for both formal and informal marketing to take place through social media platforms, with direct sales to consumers accounting for the largest proportion of income.¹⁷ The introduction of Facebook Groups is credited with a rise in the online marketing of Inuit art over the past 10 years.¹⁸

Inuit indicate this market platform continues to flourish, but inadequate Internet infrastructure remains a barrier. Capacity-building to improve marketing and e-commerce skills would also help more Inuit artists achieve greater success with online sales.

Cooperatives

For over 50 years, Inuit-owned cooperatives have provided unique opportunities for retail arts and crafts sales. The Inuit cooperative movement began in 1959 and has been a strong vehicle for growth in the Inuit economy.¹⁹ Cooperatives support communities by providing services and business development opportunities. Canadian Arctic Producers is "the wholesale art marketing arm of Arctic Cooperatives Limited ... owned and controlled by the 32 community-based, multi-purposed Cooperatives in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon."²⁰

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit cooperatives hard, as travel bans have eliminated the vital tourist trade that feeds Northern cooperatives and art distribution to customers.²¹ Cooperatives also face challenges such as high operating costs associated with doing business in the remote North (e.g., mailing and distribution) and human capital barriers associated with a lack of business skills and training.²²

15 Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, "Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy."

16 CBoC, *Busy Mines to Pave the Way*.

17 Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, "Impact of the Inuit Arts Economy."

18 Ibid.

19 Stopp, "The Inuit Cooperative Movement in Northern Canada."

20 Canadian Arctic Producers, "About Us."

21 Angeleti, "Market for Inuit Art Faces Deep Freeze."

22 Rodon and Schott, "Towards a Sustainable Future for Nunavik."

Value Creation Initiatives that Support Inuit Artistic Strengths

Inuit indicate that community initiatives such as arts and crafting programs provide important ways to build on social and cultural capital. We have heard stories describing programs that bring women and girls together to practise language and sewing. These programs create mentoring opportunities between and among both elders and youth,²³ provide instruction using traditional techniques and modern tools such as sewing machines, and supply skins and other materials for craft-making, which can be hard to access.

The Inuit Art Foundation has offered sewing machine repair workshops and other community art programs to support local artists. Capitalizing on Inuit artistic strengths and a growing need for personal protective equipment during the pandemic, the Nunavut Development Corporation partnered with the Department of Economic Development and Transportation to supply materials and contract community members to sew non-medical masks.²⁴

The *Inuit Art Quarterly*²⁵ is the Inuit Art Foundation's publication and features all genres of Inuit art. The magazine provides artisans with an outlet to share their strengths and provides exposure to a much broader audience.

Two more examples of Inuit-driven art sector growth are the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation²⁶ (IBC) and Isuma TV.²⁷ These organizations provide digital platforms that showcase Inuit screen and media talent and offer outlets for Inuit historical and contemporary narratives.

IBC was originally developed in response to the encroachment of Southern influences that accompanied expanding access to television media in the North. Community members recognized the need to leverage this medium to meet local needs and preserve language and culture. IBC programming can also be accessed through Isuma TV networks.

Isuma's platform encourages communication between Indigenous media creators globally while using technology suited to places with limited connectivity. These two initiatives provide a window into Inuit history and present life and highlight Inuit cultural continuity via artistic strength. Isuma TV also connects Inuit with instructional opportunities to learn and practise artistic skills.²⁸



23 See, for example, Qikiqtani Inuit Association, "Cultural and Community-Based Programs"; George, "We Want to Build a Fashion Industry."

24 MacDonald, "Nunavut Development Corporation Steps Up."

25 Ibid.

26 Inuit Broadcasting Corporation, "History of IBC."

27 Isuma, "Making Independent Inuit Video."

28 Isuma, "Live Art"; Isuma, "Sewing Program."

The Conservation Sector

Opportunities with Meaning

The conservation economy provides another opportunity for growth, the application of Inuit skills, and community development across Inuit Nunangat. It has the potential to provide meaningful employment opportunities, revitalize and preserve cultural traditions and knowledge, and address food sovereignty. The Qikiqtani Inuit Association's (QIA) vision for an Inuit-driven conservation economy sees "economic wealth derived from local natural resources in a way that respects and preserves [IQ], meets local needs, and restores rather than depletes natural resources and social capital."²⁹

Building on Natural Resources

The conservation sector includes a growing range of activities, including environmental protection, monitoring and remediation, resource management, green energy, ecotourism, research, and sustainability. Conservation sector activities, particularly in the North, may also include and support land-based traditional activities such as harvesting and value-added wild food processing.

Research and conservation activities already provide Inuit with employment, but there is growth potential. Land-based research and conservation is increasingly being led by Inuit in accordance with Inuit advisors and research team members. Research and other land-based activities often require logistical support and local knowledge across a range of skill areas, such as translation, guiding, monitoring and working as camp staff or bear guards.

²⁹ Qikiqtani Inuit Association, *QIA's Response to "Stronger Together."*

The Basics of an Inuit Conservation Economy

- Respects and preserves Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principles (see page 4 for a definition and description of these important Inuit social values).
- Protects land, water, and wildlife.
- Supports Inuit environmental stewardship and building resilience to climate change.
- Creates sustainable economies and local jobs that preserve and foster Inuit culture.
- Supports food sovereignty through locally harvested country food.

Source: Qikiqtani Inuit Association, *QIA's Response to "Stronger Together: An Arctic and Northern Policy Framework for Canada."*



Value Creation Initiatives that Support Inuit Ecological Strengths

Many Inuit are skilled hunters and fishers, activities that once provided a sustainable living. But not all Inuit have the means to participate fully in traditional land-based activities, preventing their engagement in an evolving economy. In fact, many Inuit face barriers to participation in the harvesting economy, which hampers their ability to supplement their incomes and provide country food for their families and communities.³⁰ These barriers include rising costs and inadequate access to the necessary fuel and equipment to make harvesting possible.³¹

Several support systems help address these barriers. For example, hunters and trappers organizations (HTOs) not only help protect Inuit traditional knowledge and wildlife and establish laws governing the regulation of hunting and fishing on Inuit lands;³² they also support harvesters by providing grants for gas, equipment, ammunition, guns, and maintenance. This support facilitates land-based skills development, sustenance, and income potential. HTOs may promote community harvest-sharing and fund community freezers through the purchase of surplus harvests. Community freezer programs serve multiple social functions by promoting land-based skills development and use,

providing income to harvesters, and supporting food sovereignty by providing access to local meat and fish at no cost to community members.

Other options include the creation of country food processing facilities like the one coming to Taloyoak in Nunavut. Entrepreneurs were awarded a \$451,000 Arctic Inspiration Prize³³ in February 2021 for the development of a country food cut-and-wrap facility that will provide affordable, healthy food to residents and create six to 10 new jobs for Inuit in the area.

Country Food Markets

The concept of country food markets has emerged as a way for hunters and fishers to sell their products and create additional value for their families. Country food sales offer an additional source of value creation. While there are tensions surrounding this market, opportunities are increasing for Inuit to use their existing skills to meet demands for access to country food across communities. This also includes competing in the South and in commercial markets. In Nunavut, a partnership between fishers and a social enterprise³⁴ provides Inuit harvesters with a platform to market Arctic char nationally. Lake to Plate³⁵ secures market-value prices for small commercial harvesters by brokering sales with retail organizations. This promotes the sale of sustainably harvested fish to previously inaccessible markets.

30 Palesch, *Creating Opportunity in Inuit Nunangat*.

31 Miller, *Harvester Support Program – Final Report*.

32 Animal Justice, *Inuvialuit Settlement Region Tuktoyaktuk Hunters and Trappers Committee Regulations*.

33 Arctic Inspiration Prize, The “By the North, For the North.”

34 Project Nunavut, “Project Nunavut Facebook Page.”

35 Lake to Plate, “The Story – Lake to Plate.” Funded by the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and the Government of Nunavut’s Fisheries and Sealing Division, 2019–present.

Inuit have mixed opinions on the impact of country food markets on access to food and cultural values. Some believe there are too few animals to support current community needs, due to rapid population growth and declines in wildlife.³⁶ Their fear is that country food markets may encourage excess hunting and overfishing.

Guardian and Stewardship Programs

Guardian and stewardship programs can be important opportunities for employment and to augment capacity-building from a strengths-based approach.³⁷ These programs build on existing Indigenous knowledge and skills to create employment and revitalize cultural practices. Guardians and stewards use their traditional knowledge and skills to offer input on trends in migration patterns, herd health and numbers, climate change, and environmental impacts associated with industries in the natural resources sector. This kind of employment and recognition of Inuit as stewards and knowledge-holders of Inuit Nunangat helps support self-determination and self-governance.³⁸



Scaling Up Conservation Sector Opportunities

Large-scale conservation initiatives capitalize on existing Inuit skills and are important paths for combining stewardship with broader employment. These programs can use Inuit knowledge to create individual and community capacity and social strength, and combine Inuit and Western knowledge to inform science and research.

- **Torngat Mountains National Park** is a joint venture between the federal government and Inuit in the northernmost region of Labrador. The park is Inuit-run and provides an excellent example of the ways in which Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principles can be used to enhance Inuit livelihoods, promote conservation and ecological research, and capitalize on the tourism industry.³⁹
- **Tallurutiup Imanga National Marine Conservation Area** is Canada's largest body of protected waters. This area was established as part of an Inuit impact and benefit agreement between the Qikiqtani Inuit Association and the federal government and includes investments from other federal departments to support harbour developments and food-processing infrastructure.⁴⁰ Along with many other positive social, cultural, and ecological benefits, Inuit environmental stewardship jobs were created.

36 Ford and others, "Food Policy in the Canadian North."

37 Thomson, "Australia Just Committed \$650 Million to Indigenous Rangers Programs"; Qikiqtani Inuit Association, *Food Sovereignty and Harvesting*.

38 Ibid.

39 Fiser and others, *Improving Public-Private Collaboration*.

40 Qikiqtani Inuit Association, "Parks and Conservation Areas."

- **SmartICE** is a social enterprise project that has developed technology to monitor climate change and Arctic ice conditions in real time. Leveraging Inuit traditional knowledge, the program trains Inuit youth to build monitoring equipment and harvesters to operate on-ice equipment, thereby building capacity, providing upskilling opportunities, and increasing the safety of those using the ice. SmartICE implements a “business model that aims to expand opportunities for economic and social development ... while preserving local cultures and lifestyle.”⁴¹
- The **Nunavut Community Aquatic Monitoring Program** was created “to assist communities in Nunavut to develop economic opportunities and to become fully active participants in the conservation of their natural resources.”⁴² It was recently renamed **IQaluk** with a renewed focus on fishery development and long-term support including fishery-related business training,⁴³ biological sampling and data collection training, and increased youth engagement. It provides continued support throughout a five-year exploratory process and links participating communities with fishery support organizations.⁴⁴

Beyond Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreements

Commercial operators in Inuit Nunangat have signed Inuit impact and benefit agreements (IIBAs) with Inuit governments and regional groups to accommodate Inuit land-claim agreements and community interests. IIBAs place an emphasis on training and employment of Inuit to remove barriers to labour market participation.

Including Inuit contracting requirements in IIBAs has become commonplace and helps to stimulate local business development. Whenever possible, mines are also required to seek out local Inuit labour, allowing a larger proportion of Inuit workers to find regular, gainful employment in various phases of mine development.⁴⁵ But even with IIBA provisions, employment opportunities are scarce. Lack of education, experience, training, and qualifications have been cited as obstacles preventing Inuit from securing work.⁴⁶ More work can be done to improve this situation.



41 SmartICE, “Enabling Resiliency in the Face of Climate Change.”

42 Nunavut Department of Economic Development and Transportation, “Fisheries and Sealing.”

43 See also Schott and others, “Operationalizing Knowledge Coevolution.”

44 Stephan Schott, personal communication, June 21, 2021.

45 Palesch, *Creating Opportunity in Inuit Nunangat*, 42.

46 Statistics Canada, *Labour Market Experiences of Inuit*, 9.

Bridging Training and Opportunity

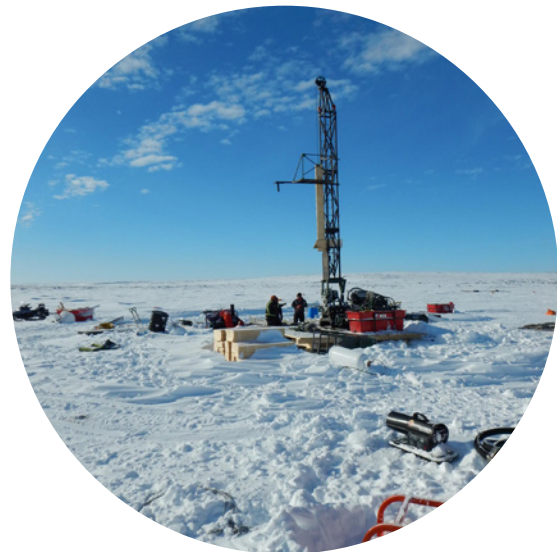
Programs that focus on foundational skills and identifying skill equivalencies are key. IIBAs have the potential to bridge employment opportunities with Inuit skills. This can be addressed through training and education partnerships tailored to industry needs and skills gaps. In Nunavut, fishing industry partners have created a training consortium to address labour market gaps in the fishing and marine sectors.⁴⁷ The consortium was originally meant to address fisheries training gaps, but evolved in recognition of labour needs in emerging marine sectors. Transferability of skills was also recognized as a benefit of the program.

Baffinland Mines and QIA have a similar initiative that provides funding to the Qikiqtani Skills and Training for Employment Partnership (Q-STEP) program. This initiative provides training to help meet labour needs for the Mary River Project and other opportunities in the region.⁴⁸ Funded by government and industry, this program is also tied to the Mining Industry Human Resources Council to deliver preparatory programs for life skills and pre-employment skills training.

The Meliadine Project IIBA has commitments to assess skills equivalency and provide mentorship programming, supervisory and management development training, and entrepreneurial training for Inuit businesses.⁴⁹

Each of these initiatives has the potential to highlight (and more directly leverage) existing skills and augment foundational skills that are transferable across multiple sectors.

Organizations can explore opportunities to link harvesting and sewing skills to company and employee needs. For example, the provision of country foods for employee meals⁵⁰ and the production of uniforms and personal protective equipment⁵¹ or textile repair. These can be achieved through industry procurement policies and provide creative ways for industry partners to engage with and support local communities. The benefits of this for economic growth in Inuit Nunangat will support sustainable living for community members and provide opportunities for balance between Inuit traditional values and the wage economy.



47 Nunavut Fisheries and Marine Training Consortium, "About."

48 Aglu Consulting and Training Inc., and Stratos Inc., *2020 Socio-Economic Monitoring Report for the Mary River Project*.

49 Kivalliq Inuit Association and Agnico Eagle Mines Ltd., *Meliadine Project: Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreement*.

50 Aglu Consulting and Training Inc., and Stratos Inc., *Agnico Kivalliq Projects: 2020 Socio-Economic Monitoring Program Report*.

51 Greer, "Thrift Store Facelift."

What We've Learned

To maximize the potential associated with these opportunities for employers and northerners alike, the recognition and use of Inuit traditional knowledge and skills will be pivotal. Economic opportunities continue to evolve in the North alongside Inuit lifestyles and the ways in which Inuit define sustainable livelihoods. Achieving a sustainable livelihood in a complex mixed economy requires support. A greater understanding of the current skills landscape in Inuit Nunangat will open doors to emerging opportunities.

One important component to developing this understanding is acknowledging the social, cultural, and economic worth of land-based activities for Inuit. Increasing income from the Inuit traditional economy can be achieved without compromising Inuit culture, traditions, and values by exploring ways to increase capacity through traditional land-based practices, developing assessments to identify skills equivalencies, and providing foundational training that builds transferable skills. Finding balance between commercialising traditional activities and ensuring food security and cultural continuity will require Inuit-driven solutions. Results can also be achieved through creative partnerships that link community strengths to employer needs.

Next Steps

We will continue to work with policy-makers and industry leaders from across Inuit Nunangat to understand their perspectives on the issues. Our future research will focus on developing a toolkit to help employers recognize existing capacity and knowledge and support Inuit in achieving sustainable livelihoods that reflect their values. Our work will seek to improve employers' general understanding of the relevance of Inuit values, traditional knowledge, strengths, and skills, and we will explore ways that employers can craft employee supports, bridging opportunities, and training approaches to better align with their Inuit employees and partners.



Appendix A

Methodology

The findings in this briefing are derived from:

- an environmental scan of available grey literature examining economic and employment realities of Inuit Nunangat and remote Northern Canada;
- an interdisciplinary review of available academic reports on Northern livelihoods and labour market participation;
- feedback from Inuit knowledge holders and advisory board members.



Appendix B

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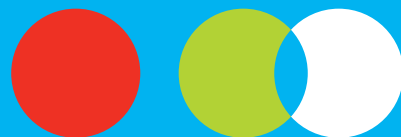
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