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# The Role of the Hunter in Inuit Nunangat's Mixed Economy

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The Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures (FSC-CCF) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead.

The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada.

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# Key findings

- Hunters are an important provider of essential community services—hunting and harvesting skills are critically linked to food security, physical and mental well-being, and sustainable livelihoods in the North.
- The hunter role has evolved over generations, but hunters' core skills and knowledge remain in high demand. Today, hunting skills are also foundational to many roles in the conservation sector in the North.
- Finding a balance between market-based opportunities and community-based commitments is key. Hunter support programs offset costs associated with being on the land, helping to create balance and enabling greater participation.
- Inuit-led initiatives and Inuit-driven partnerships are creating new opportunities for economic diversification in the conservation economy.





# Hunters provide essential services to communities

Hunters play an important role in the mixed economy of Inuit Nunangat, the Inuit homeland across the Arctic expanse in Canada. Hunting and harvesting skills are critically linked to food security, physical and mental well-being, and sustainable livelihoods in the North.<sup>1</sup>

Recent research with Inuit communities in the Arctic has shown that every \$50 invested in local hunting and harvesting equates to enough country food (e.g., caribou, char) to feed 20 individuals.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the same \$50 at local Northern grocery stores provides access to meat for fewer than four individuals, and that meat will be less fresh and have less cultural value.



Hunters also facilitate access to land-based activities, such as hunting and fishing, which are integral to Inuit livelihoods and heritage. Participation on the land creates community wellness and provides adult community members with opportunities to reclaim lost cultural knowledge or to mentor younger generations. In this way, hunters are teachers and mentors. When youth receive mentorship from skilled hunters, they develop skills and a purposeful sense of identity. Land-based skills, including hunting, are largely passed on intergenerationally within families and local communities. However, an educational curriculum on land-based experiential knowledge can supplement family training and support youth who lack access to resources and family mentors.

<sup>1</sup> Qikiqtani Inuit Association, *QIA's Response to "Stronger Together."*

<sup>2</sup> MakeWay, "Community-Led Hunter/Harvester Programs."

## Benefits across a range of economic sectors

Hunters' skills are also relevant to numerous economic sectors in Inuit Nunangat. The hunter role has evolved over generations, and most hunters now work in a mixed economy of market income opportunities and land-based activities tied to social commitments and community reciprocity.

## The mixed economy of Inuit Nunangat

Achieving a sustainable livelihood in Inuit Nunangat means finding balance between market-based opportunities and community-based commitments. A sustainable livelihood fulfills a person's long-term material and socio-cultural needs.<sup>3</sup> It includes the skills, physical and social resources, and activities that allow people to meet their material, community, and cultural needs.

Many Inuit participate in the wage economy and social economy of land-based activities. Across Inuit Nunangat, Inuit are predominantly employed in the public and mining sectors.<sup>4</sup> However, many Inuit also report high levels of seasonal work and underemployment.

Land-based activities in the Inuit social economy traditionally haven't been tied to the exchange of goods or services for money. These land-based activities:

- provide food, clothing, and tools
- strengthen social inclusion and nurture cultural traditions and languages
- fortify the identities and self-determination of Inuit

- reinforce Inuit ties to the land
- across Inuit Nunangat, skilled hunters help sustain their families and feed communities. Research indicates that if given the appropriate economic supports, a hunter could contribute 2,000 kilograms of country food to a community in a year.<sup>5</sup>

The colonial legacy of forced settlement has required Inuit to adapt their land-based activities.<sup>6</sup> The costs associated with hunting, harvesting, and other land-based activities have also escalated with the adoption of new technologies. Participation in the wage economy is a common means to supplement income to purchase the necessary tools, but wage-earning opportunities can be scarce, especially in remote communities.

Hunter support programs help create balance and enable greater participation on the land while offsetting some of the costs. Full-time positions that provide hunters with a regular wage for their work are currently in early test phases,<sup>7</sup> and other communities can access a toolkit to develop their own initiatives and this work has led to a toolkit for new initiatives.<sup>8</sup> Subsidies and/or grants may also be available to hunters; eligibility is determined by communities and regional governments. Funding supports generally cover equipment and fuel costs based on the trips made and days spent on the land (specifications are set by funders). Other community programs may also subsidize fuel, and many offer to purchase meat from hunters to support communal sharing through community freezer programs.

3 Scoones, *Sustainable Rural Livelihoods*

4 Arriagada and Bleakney, *Inuit Participation*; Employment and Social Development Canada, *Nunavut Inuit Labour Force Analysis Report*; and Statistics Canada, *Labour Market Experiences of Inuit*.

5 MakeWay, "Community-Led Hunter/Harvester Programs."

6 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*.

7 MakeWay, "Community-Led Hunter/Harvester Programs"; and Ittaq Heritage & Research Centre, "Flagship Land-Based Programs."

8 Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, *Hunter/Harvester/Guardian Program*.



Hunter skills and expertise are foundational to other roles in the conservation sector and offshoot economies,<sup>11</sup> such as Indigenous guardians, game wardens, conservation officers, Hunters and Trappers Association (HTA) managers, guides, and outfitters in eco-tourism, and environmental monitors. These roles support environmental management efforts across the Arctic, including national and local conservation efforts and monitoring work in the resource-extraction sectors. For example, Indigenous guardians are employed by some Northern mines to monitor adverse environmental impacts.<sup>12</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Qikiqtani Inuit Association, *QIA's Response to "Stronger Together."*

<sup>12</sup> Land Needs Guardians, "Voisey's Bay Mine."

## Inuit-defined conservation economy

An Inuit conservation economy involves active participation in "environmental stewardship and parks management, fisheries, food harvesting, processing and distribution, research, education and training as well as many offshoot industries."

Qikiqtani Inuit Association defines Inuit conservation economy as one that:

- Respects and preserves Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit
- Protects the land, water and wildlife as guided by the Nunavut Agreement
- 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

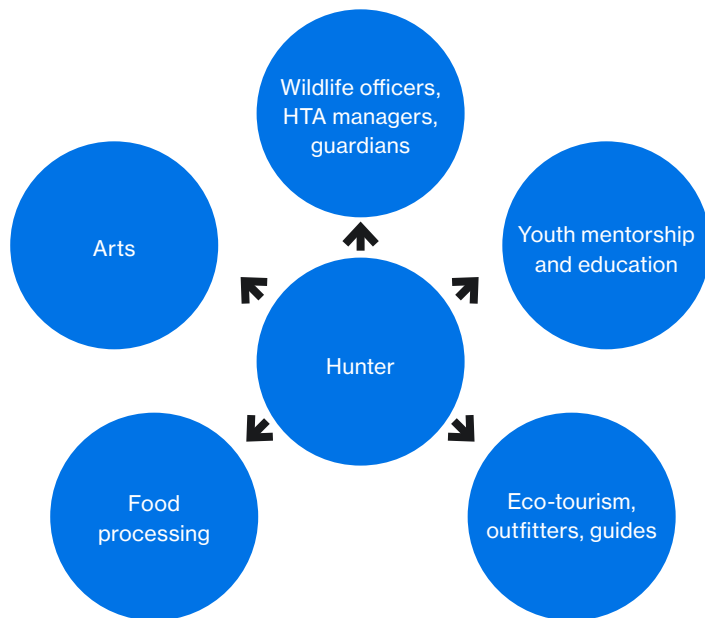
Source: Qikiqtani Inuit Association, *QIA's Response to "Stronger Together,"* 9–10.



Hunter skills are also in high demand by research programs in the North. They're essential for navigating the Arctic, gathering data on and monitoring the environment, bridging gaps, and building capacity between Inuit and Western science.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 1**

The central role of the hunter: Land-based skills foundational to conservation sector participation



Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

# Translating the hunter role into a job profile

Job profiles provide an overview of core skills and abilities, essential responsibilities, qualifications, and experiences required to be competent in a role. As essential service providers, hunters possess skill sets that are multi-faceted and adaptable across the many sectors of Inuit Nunangat's emerging conservation economy.

Here, we illustrate how the skills and capabilities of hunters correspond to a culturally appropriate job profile.

## Requirements

- Extensive (3–5 years') experience hunting, fishing, and trapping.
- Demonstrated experience processing country foods (e.g., skinning, cleaning, butchering, safe storage, and food preparation).
- Demonstrated knowledge of the territory (i.e., spatial, geographic), local flora and fauna, and seasonal patterns of animal migration and movement.
- Demonstrated familiarity with hunting areas and ability to navigate land and water safely across all seasons and weather conditions.

<sup>13</sup> Chapman and Schott, "Knowledge Coevolution"; Fox and others, "Connecting Understandings of Weather and Climate"; Schott and others, "Operationalizing Knowledge Coevolution"; and Polar Knowledge Canada, *Polar Knowledge*.

- Demonstrated experience and knowledge of survival skills, including safety awareness and risk mitigation measures. Ability to plan and execute necessary mitigation and rescue operations in cases of emergency.
- Ability to assess the health of animals, plants, and water bodies, including in relation to food safety and security.
- Access to equipment required for hunting such as snowmobiles, boats, and guns and demonstrated ability to use and maintain necessary equipment.
- Ability to do cost-analysis and budgeting for hunting trips individually or in groups.
- Ability to complete funding and subsidy applications to access hunter support programs.
- Ability to lead, supervise, mentor/coach, and provide land-based education to novice hunters.
- Successful candidates may have the opportunity to apply practical skills by job-shadowing experienced hunters.

**Certifications for the following are an asset:**

Firearms and safety training; bear guard training; small vehicle operation training; survival skills training; and vehicle and equipment maintenance, including small engine repair. Equivalent experiences will also be considered an asset.



# Inuit-led initiatives and Inuit-driven partnerships drive economic diversification

Inuit are leading opportunities with holistic visions of community growth, cultural continuity, food sovereignty and security, self-determination, and sustainability (both environmental and economic development).

Inuit are driving Inuit Nunangat's food security strategies and food sovereignty ambitions. They're experimenting with and debating the social value of country food markets and expanding and scaling up traditional harvesting practices—for example, through onshore and offshore fisheries. Communities are employing local hunters to support food security and teach youth vital land-based skills, mentor novice hunters, and monitor environmental and climate change. Entrepreneurial hunters are also becoming more involved in Arctic tourism.

To build awareness and recognition of Inuit scientific knowledge, Inuit are undertaking initiatives such as working with researchers to facilitate the co-production of knowledge for collaborative environmental management. Inuit views of caring for land and water are apparent in developing Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, Marine Protected Areas, and Guardians programs. Inuit understandings of the land, weather, and ice have helped inform projects like SmartICE<sup>14</sup> and Inuit-led platforms like SIKU<sup>15</sup> by providing real-time delivery of information on ice and environmental conditions. This knowledge is integral to safe passage of land and sea for all individuals living, working, and travelling in the Arctic.



14 SmartICE, "Enabling Resiliency."

15 Arctic Eider Society, "Take Your Community-Driven Research Project to the Next Level With SIKU!"

# What's next?

Inuit knowledge holders, including hunters, have a powerful set of skills that are essential to their communities and applicable across many sectors of the conservation economy. When employers understand and value these skills, they can be adapted to a variety of employment roles, a process we define as **skills inclusion**.<sup>16</sup> In turn, Inuit-led initiatives drive new economic opportunities for the region, particularly in the conservation economy.

Supporting Inuit hunters and harvesters and the practice of land-based skills can feed into emerging opportunities in the conservation economy. Championing engagement in the conservation economy encourages sustainable growth and capacity development.<sup>17</sup> The conservation sector provides a growing body of job opportunities that build on skills that Inuit have relied on for millennia. These skills are integral to fields such as land stewardship, community harvesters, food processing and distribution, research and data collection, environmental management, conservation and monitoring, sustainable land use planning, education, and tourism. These jobs will strengthen communities, support cultural continuity, educate youth, and foster self-determination, in addition to protecting and preserving the environment.

Taking these ideas one step further, our *Human Resources Toolkit: Approaches for Skills Inclusion in Inuit Nunangat* provides practical tools and resources to help Northern employers recruit and retain Inuit employees. In this resource, we offer guidance on recognizing transferable skills and how to apply these skills in practice by demonstrating how the interview process can be used to translate hunter skills into wage-based employment opportunities.



<sup>16</sup> Hibbert, Stonefish, and Sarwath, *Human Resources Toolkit*; and Stonefish, *Linking Skills to Employment*.

<sup>17</sup> Qikiqtani Inuit Association, *QIA's Response to "Stronger Together."*

## Appendix A

# Methodology

The findings in this briefing are derived from an environmental scan of available academic and grey literature examining the conservation economy and employment realities of Inuit Nunangat and remote Northern Canada. Information was also gathered through informal discussions and interviews with Inuit knowledge holders taking place between November 2021 and July 2022.

## Appendix B

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