

Project Insights Report

# Fisheries for Economic and Environmental Development in the North (FEED the North)



**PARTNERS**

Ocean Wise Conservation Association



**LOCATIONS**

British Columbia  
Nunavut



**INVESTMENT**

\$450,837



**PUBLISHED**

September 2024



**CONTRIBUTORS**

Hilary Hagar  
*Policy Analyst at FSC*

## Executive Summary

The FEED the North project, spearheaded by the Ocean Wise Conservation Association, targeted economic and environmental challenges in Nunavut, which were intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and by climate change. This initiative aimed to merge traditional Inuit knowledge with Western science, enhancing sustainability in local fisheries and bridging Indigenous and Western environmental conservation methods.

The project engaged Indigenous youth, rights-holders, stakeholders and environmental NGOs, focusing on empowering Indigenous youth and integrating community values into sustainability frameworks. Through workshops, the project fostered mutual understanding and co-developed a sustainable assessment framework for Northern small-scale fisheries.

Key insights from the project demonstrated the effectiveness of inclusive, community-driven approaches. The workshops not only equipped Northern Indigenous youth with leadership skills but also aimed to address historical challenges in incorporating Indigenous knowledge into sustainability practices. The adopted methodology emphasized adaptability and cross-cultural collaboration, leading to a new holistic framework that integrated diverse knowledge systems.

The outcomes stressed the significance of community engagement, cultural sensitivity and partnership building in achieving sustainable development that respects both scientific and traditional management aspects. Aligned with the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, the project sets a precedent for future policies, advocating for continued support to enhance the socioeconomic and cultural welfare of Northern communities.

### KEY INSIGHTS

1

A sustainability assessment framework for Northern small-scale fisheries was co-developed, advancing concepts of seafood sustainability and emphasizing the need for continuous adaptation and learning.

- 2 By prioritizing Indigenous knowledge and collaborative partnerships, the project laid a foundation for enhanced understanding and cooperation within the fisheries industry, demonstrating the significant impact of community-driven initiatives focused on youth empowerment and cross-cultural networking.
- 3 When Indigenous organizations can serve as a bridge between southern-based researchers and northern Indigenous communities, these organizations can play a critical role in fostering meaningful engagement and trust.

## ▶ The Issue

The Fisheries for Economic and Environmental Development in the North (FEED the North) project, initiated by the [Ocean Wise Conservation Association](#), in partnership with [Ikaarvik](#), aimed to address the economic and environmental challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change in Nunavut. These challenges threatened the main employment sources in areas reliant on fisheries. A key issue was the limited involvement of Indigenous fisheries and small-scale operations in recognized sustainable seafood programs, such as Ocean Wise. This lack of representation not only hindered economic growth in Northern communities but also overlooked the valuable Traditional Knowledge that could be integrated with Western science to improve Arctic fishery sustainability.

Historically, Arctic fisheries' integration into sustainable seafood frameworks primarily relied on Western science, with little recognition of Inuit Traditional Knowledge or significant co-management roles for Northern communities. This approach created a cultural and communication gap, as evidenced by the absence of terms equivalent to "sustainable" in Inuit languages and by the systemic barriers that marginalized Indigenous knowledge systems.

The project was geographically focused on the Arctic region, with a particular focus on Northern Indigenous communities. It aimed to enhance the sustainability of Arctic fisheries by integrating traditional Indigenous knowledge with Western scientific methods. Additionally, the initiative strove to build trust, address historical colonial impacts and empower Indigenous youth.



## What We Investigated

The project involved a partnership between Ocean Wise Conservation Association, Ikaarvik, and Indigenous youth from Gjoa Haven and Pond Inlet. Its key objectives included developing a holistic framework that integrated traditional Inuit knowledge with Western science to assess the sustainability of Arctic fisheries, empowering Inuit youth by involving them in creating a framework with global potential, and enhancing the representation of Indigenous and small-scale fisheries within the Ocean Wise program.

Using a participatory approach to ensure active involvement from local youth and leaders throughout all stages, from planning to implementation, the project held two workshops in Nunavut and Vancouver. The workshops were intended to foster a shared understanding of sustainable fisheries among participants and also test the capacity of southern NGOs to engage effectively with Inuit communities and youth, with a focus on building relationships, developing skills and facilitating dialogue.

The alignment with community-centric objectives was crucial, even as the project faced challenges and had to adapt activities and timelines. Qualitative data collected through key informant interviews and document reviews, including virtual interviews with participants from Ocean Wise, Ikaarvik, youth mentors and other stakeholders, allowed for flexibility in the evaluation process to adapt to emerging findings. The thematic analysis of this data provided insights into the project's impact and effectiveness, highlighting both barriers and enablers to integration.

## What We're Learning

### **Workshops that centre Indigenous perspectives empower Indigenous youth**

The project successfully conducted two workshops with 20 youth from Gjoa Haven and Pond Inlet. These workshops were instrumental in empowering Northern Indigenous youth, providing them with networking and skill-building opportunities that boosted their confidence and future leadership potential. The workshops facilitated meaningful interactions and ensured that Indigenous perspectives shaped the project's direction. This engagement highlighted the importance of inclusivity and the empowerment of youth in community-based initiatives.

### **Integrating Traditional Knowledge and Western perspectives supports progress**

The project fostered cross-cultural and cross-contextual partnerships and involved a diverse range of stakeholders, such as government agencies, NGOs and industry partners. This collaboration was crucial for knowledge sharing and trust building across different cultural and organizational contexts. The participatory approach supported progress in co-developing a sustainability assessment framework for Northern small-scale fisheries. This involved defining and discussing concepts of seafood sustainability, which will inform future initiatives in the Arctic region. The collaborative efforts underscored the iterative nature of sustainability assessments and the importance of continuous adaptation and learning.

## **Why It Matters**

The FEED the North project addressed the disproportionate effects of climate change on Arctic ecosystems and communities, underscoring the cultural and economic significance of fisheries in these regions. The initiative aimed to make Arctic small-scale fisheries more economically viable by gaining formal recognition for their sustainable practices, thereby improving access to sustainable seafood markets.

Significant to policy and practice, the project aligns with the [Arctic and Northern Policy Framework](#) by addressing economic and cultural challenges in Northern regions impacted by climate change. It emphasizes the need for flexibility, transparency and cultural humility in engagements between non-Indigenous organizations and Indigenous communities.

This project stands as a model for inclusive and culturally relevant sustainable development that combines Indigenous knowledge with Western science. It fostered community empowerment and economic growth, respecting and integrating Northern Indigenous values and priorities.

Key lessons highlight the importance of shifting from traditional project management focused solely on deliverables to a more holistic understanding of impact. This involves adapting to community paces, being flexible with timelines and objectives, and recognizing the value of relationship-building as a key outcome.

The project advocates for long-term commitments to building trust and continuity in community initiatives in the North. It suggests dedicated funding and positions tailored for Northern community residents, supporting local youth in accessing high-quality positions and education without relocating, thus addressing resource disparities and empowering communities toward self-sufficiency.

## **What's Next**

Ocean Wise continues to work with [small-scale fisheries in Arctic](#) communities to better understand and integrate traditional ecological knowledge into their standards for sustainability.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact [communications@fsc-ccf.ca](mailto:communications@fsc-ccf.ca).

### **How to Cite This Report**

Hagar, H. (2024) Project Insights Report: Fisheries for Economic and Environmental Development in the North (FEED the North). Toronto: Future Skills Centre. <https://fsc-ccf.ca/projects/feed-the-north-2/>

Funded by the  
Government of Canada's  
Future Skills Program



Fisheries for Economic and Environmental Development in the North (FEED the North) is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

© Copyright 2024 – Future Skills Centre / Centre des Compétences futures