

# Executive Summary

*Pinasunniq: Reflections on a Northern Indigenous Economy* is an expression of a vision of Inuit economic self-determination. Through twelve articles, featuring nine Inuit authors, the report weaves diverse perspectives on the Northern economy grounding Indigenous, and specifically Inuit, values. The report challenges the accepted approaches to developing an economy in the North and proposes alternatives centred around sustainability, reciprocity, culture and care.

The economic narrative of the North has been dominated by a colonial framework that prioritizes resource extraction and industrial development, often marginalizing or erasing the Inuit economy. This report seeks to shift that narrative by emphasizing the importance of economies rooted in harvesting, crafting, conservation, art, and care and demonstrating their “value.”

This executive summary synthesizes key themes of the report and is structured into three main parts: the context of the Northern economy, Inuit-led land-based economic activities, and the importance of arts, crafts, and care economies. The overarching aim of the report is to begin a conversation on transforming the economy toward principles of reciprocity, respect for the land, and sharing within communities.

## PART 01 CONTEXTUALIZING THE NORTHERN ECONOMY

The first part of the report offers both historical context and a critique of the current economic landscape of the North. The economy in Nunavut has traditionally been shaped by external forces or actors — governments, industries, and consultants — that often exclude or marginalize Inuit participation

(though this is shifting somewhat with strong Inuit organizations). This systemic exclusion has led to an economic “cleavage” where Inuit economic activities are overshadowed by a “mainstream” sector.

In his chapter outlining the current state of the Nunavut economy, Mattias Oschinsky explores the so-called “mixed economy” of the North, emphasizing the inequities in government support for various economic sectors. While hunting and arts provide food security and jobs, mining earns the vast majority of economic support. Oschinsky finds that for every \$1 million invested in mining, three jobs are created; the same amount in the arts creates 25 jobs. And regarding hunting, a \$50 investment in hunting can feed 20 individuals, while the same amount spent at a grocery store provides enough food for just four people.

**Meanwhile, in the mainstream economy, Oschinsky demonstrates barriers to Inuit participation. He finds that even when the education levels are the same between Inuit and non-Inuit, the latter are paid substantially more. Why is this the case?**

Following Oschinsky, Siila Watt Cloutier provides insights into the transformation of the Northern economy over time and the emergence of an economy that, by and large, revolves around the priorities of newcomers. While she demonstrates that Inuit have been active in maintaining their interests and even advocating globally for them, there are political challenges that must be addressed. She champions an approach to the political economy that integrates cultural, spiritual, and economic well-being, emphasizing the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness of these elements in any economic model that seeks to benefit Inuit communities.



This report is meant to help generate dialogue on Inuit defined economy, the trajectory of it and, perhaps, reimagine the path. The chapters in this report centre Inuit perspectives on the concept of economic development with a focus on the hunting economy, arts and economies of care, and community-based efforts that renew and build Inuit values and connections.

## **PART 02** **THE ECONOMY OF NUNA AND SILA**

The second part of the report explores Inuit-led economic activities that revolve around the land and sea. Hunting, harvesting, and fishing are not just sources of food, but also integral parts of Inuit culture, social structures, and spiritual life. Far too often, governments define economic growth strictly in terms of goods and services produced, but an Inuit conceptualization of the economy places more emphasis on relationships and well-being — with the land and among one another. What makes these practices economic?

Janine Lightfoot and Hayden King explore the roles of hunting education programs aimed at ensuring food sovereignty and maintaining Indigenous knowledge. These programs are not only vital for food security but could potentially lead to the growth of hunter support programs and paid hunters — something Esa Qillaq writes about, demonstrating the promise of full-time hunters initiatives. Meanwhile, Richard Paton expands the focus with consideration of the benefits of a conservation-based economy that balances ecological preservation with economic growth. These contributions reflect a blended, mixed economy. Finally, Jason Akearok turns attention to the sea and the economic potential of Inuit-led fisheries if a rights-based framework for economic development was employed.

## **PART 03:** **THE ECONOMY OF ARTS, CRAFTS, AND CARE**

The third part of the report shifts focus to other important sectors of the Inuit economy, including arts, crafts, and care-based work. Considered even less for their economic potential than land-based economic activities, arts, in particular, are a widespread practice among Inuit. This can be market-based or family-based (for example, making clothing for one another). And yet, for Inuit, these activities are foundational to community connection, cultural continuity, and the foundation of care-based exchange. Can there be an economy of care?

In her chapter, Barbara Akoak reflects on her experiences within the arts and crafts sector, highlighting the challenges posed by mass commercialization and Northern monopolies. Despite these challenges, the arts are an essential part of the Inuit economy. This is reflected further in Kunuk Inuitiq's interview with Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory, which explores the transformative potential of decolonial art in challenging colonial economic practices. They argue that the arts can play a significant role in reclaiming Inuit identity and resisting commodification.

Finally, Romani Makkik discusses the role of care-based work in Inuit communities, emphasizing its importance for community and individual well-being. She argues that care work, though often undervalued, is a vital component of a thriving Inuit economy — there is 'economic' value in looking after each other, even as the systems fail Inuit (mental health care, medical escorts, funerals, bereavement care, prisoner or treatment after care, elder care just to list a few).

## KEY ELEMENTS OF PINASUNNIQ

### → Ongoing Reclamation

While the report demonstrates that Inuit are currently practicing economic activities, the support for this work is limited. It calls for recognizing and revitalizing land-based activities that sustain Inuit cultural practices and community well-being and result in significant economic benefits.

### → Culture as Economy

Language and culture education are critical for economic success in Inuit communities. The report advocates for greater investment in Inuktitut language education and economic initiatives that revolve around Inuit culture to strengthen Inuit economic participation.

### → Economic Diversification

The report suggests reconsidering government overreliance on mining and extractive industries as the primary drivers of economic growth. Instead, policies should support diverse economic activities, including arts, conservation, and traditional food harvesting.

### → Community-Led Priorities

Numerous community-based programs are already underway, rooted in rights or land claim-based frameworks and flowing from Inuit interests. Whether harvesting or arts, conservation economies or care, following Inuit priorities can result in more sustainable economic opportunities.

### → Addressing Social Inequality

Economic analysis demonstrates tremendous structural barriers to Inuit participation in the wage economy - even in cases where Inuit have the qualifications, they are hired and paid less. This mirrors social well-being indicators as well. This discrimination must be addressed in any Northern economy that is presumed to be fair and equitable.

## CONCLUSION

The report concludes by emphasizing the need for a transformation in how the Northern economy is conceived and managed. It calls for a shift in priorities from an extractive and externally-driven economic model to one rooted in Inuit values and led by Inuit voices. The key to this transformation lies in recognizing the interconnectedness of the economy with culture and language, land/sea, and community resilience and well-being.

***Pinasunniq: Reflections on a Northern Indigenous Economy provides both a critique of the current economic model in the North and an intervention advocating for new conversations about alternative economic models.***

This executive summary highlights the urgent need for more inclusive and relevant approaches to economic development in Inuit Nunangat that honour the traditions, knowledge, language, and aspirations of Inuit. The report is not just an analysis of past and present challenges in the North but a call to action for transformative change, emphasizing that sustainable economic development must be led by those most intimately connected to it. Or, as Kunuk Inutiq writes in the preface, “Colonialism and imperialism sought to destroy how we define who we are, our relationships with each other, and our natural environment... [but] we are reclaiming ourselves and our relationships in Nunavut — while acknowledging the challenges we face.”