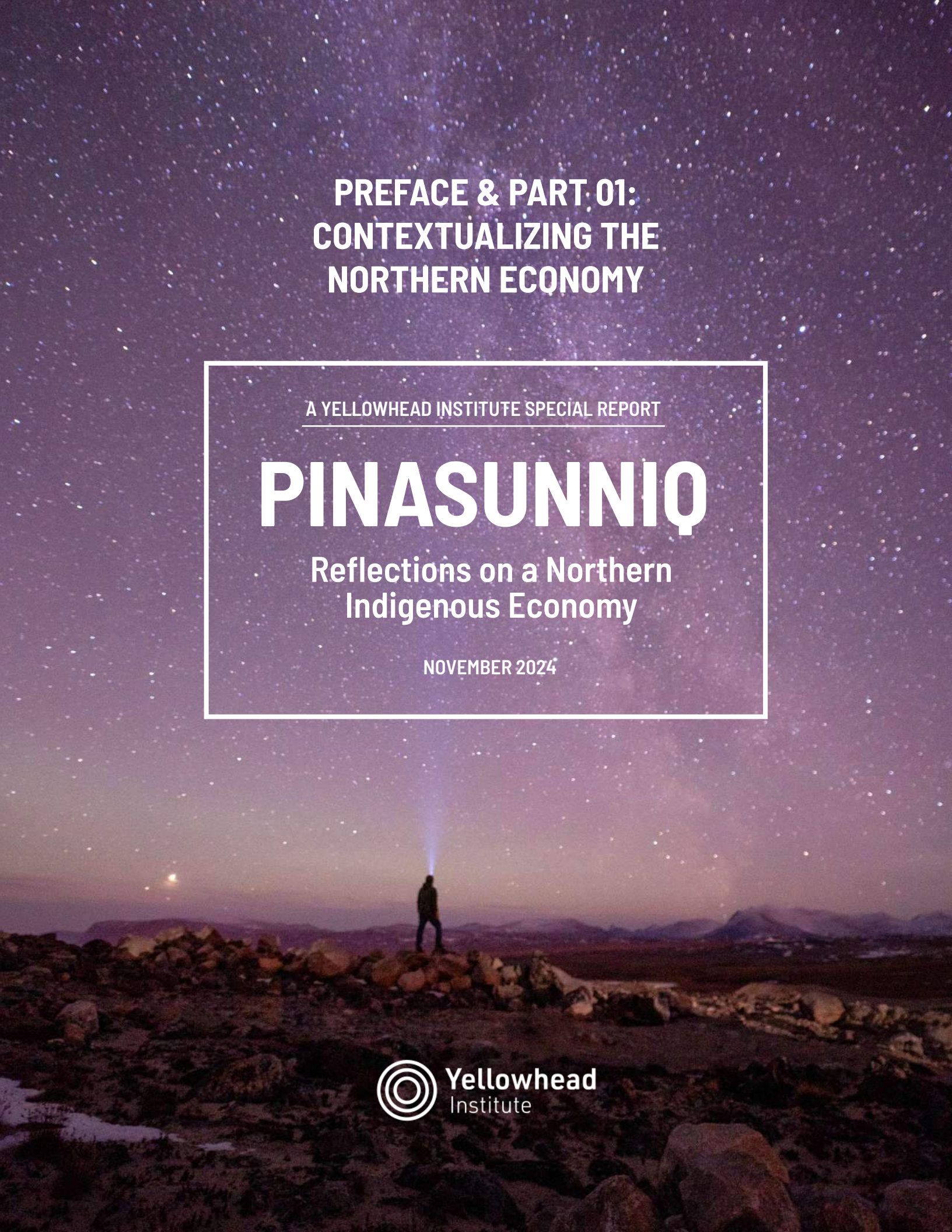
# PREFACE & PART 01: CONTEXTUALIZING THE NORTHERN ECONOMY

A YELLOWHEAD INSTITUTE SPECIAL REPORT

# PINASUNNIQ

## Reflections on a Northern Indigenous Economy

NOVEMBER 2024



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**ABSTRACT**

*Pinasunniq: Reflections on a Northern Indigenous Economy** offers a vision of Inuit economic self-determination. It challenges the "common sense" Northern economic models that have historically excluded Inuit voices and continue to erase Inuit economic activity. Through economic analysis, narrative, and advocacy, the report asks critical questions about the benefits of government-led policy and approaches of industry. In contrast, it offers examples of Inuit-centered economic frameworks in practice today that prioritize sustainability, reciprocity, and care. Part 01 reviews the current landscape, reflecting on systemic barriers to Inuit-led development. Part 02 addresses traditional economic activities, particularly hunting, harvesting, and food sovereignty, emphasizing the role of Indigenous knowledge. Part 03 explores economic diversity through the arts and care-based economies, with perspectives on healing, meaningful work, and reconciliation. Ultimately, this edited report is not just an analysis but a call to action to envision and act upon a future where Inuit have the authority to shape their economy in ways that foster cultural revitalization and community well-being. Pinasunniq demonstrates how Inuit leadership in economic discourse can shift us toward a path for transformative change rooted in self-determination and aligning with Inuit values.

**Pinasunniq* translates loosely to "endeavour" or "venture".

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# PREFACE
# Recovering Ourselves through Kaujjajjuk

We grow up with stories that teach us how to relate to the world. These stories provide important lessons. They guide us, and each time we hear them, depending on where we are in life and what we've experienced since the last time we heard them, offer a new lens to view the world. They often depict extreme situations and how we should or should not behave. The teachings help us strive for inuusiqattiarniq — the ultimate aim of living a good life through collective well-being and relationships with our surroundings.

Inuit believe that a person's character is reflected most clearly in how they treat a vulnerable person, like an orphaned child or widowed woman with no one to hunt for them. The story of Kaujjajjuk is an important one in our region of Nunavut in Inuit Nunangat (Inuit Homelands).

Kaujjajjuk, an orphan boy, lived with his cruel grandparents. Kaujjajjuk means "the one to be picked up by the nostrils." When he entered the igluvigaq (iglu), he would be pulled into the dwelling by the nostrils to the point they became stretched from the continual abuse. Not worthy of a name, he was referred to by how he was tormented.

This story has much to offer in how we work towards reclamation after experiencing the abuses of colonialism.

**How we look after ourselves, our families, and our community defines how we live our lives, including our laws, philosophy, and value systems.**

These are determined by the environment we live in. That is why a conversation on land and the subsequent subject of what an economy is stands at the crux of Indigenous, including Inuit, self-determination.

In Inuit legal systems, values stem from our hunting way of life. Atuutiqarniq (sense of purpose) and Inuuqatauttiarniq (being a healthy and productive member of society) are important aspects of one's well-being, sense of self, and belonging.

Colonialism and imperialism sought to destroy how we define who we are, our relationships with each other, and our natural environment. Here, I explore the ways in which we are reclaiming ourselves and our relationships in Nunavut while acknowledging the challenges we face. The story of Kaujjajjuk helps explain our plight and what we must keep in mind as we work to reclaim our minds, our bodies, and our lives.

## HISTORY

In pursuit of determining our own destiny, including self-government, it is crucial to understand the history of the economic aspects of colonialism — what it was or is and how it impacts us today — so that we may be able to free ourselves from its grip.

Maintaining imperialistic and capitalistic ideas of economy limits our ability to control our destiny because it ties us to the current oppressive systems. Defining our own economy in the larger context of Indigenous resistance and "Land Back" is inherently connected to the concept of self-determination and our very identities. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes:

> **The real aim of colonialism was to control the people's wealth: what they produced, how they produced it, and how it was distributed; to control, in other words, the entire realm of the language of real life. Colonialism imposed its control of the social production of wealth through military conquest and subsequent political dictatorship. But its most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world. Economic and political control can never be complete or effective without mental control. To control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-determination in relationship to others.**[1]

Colonialism in the North did two things at the outset: It oppressed Indigenous peoples by claiming our lands and then exploited our lands and peoples for wealth building. The policies of colonial destruction took place insidiously over decades and continue to cause damage to our psyche. We live with its harms in various ways, from internalizing inferiority to dealing with conditions resulting from colonial trauma.

England's colonization of North America was economic, designed to build wealth for their Empire, and done through a campaign of dehumanization. "In Europe there was an aggressive competition for overseas territorial acquisitions and the emergence in colonising countries of doctrines of racial superiority which denied the fitness of subjugated peoples for self-government." [2]

Waves of contact and colonialism depleted our autonomy. First, the explorers looking for a shorter route to Asia from Europe brought sicknesses. Second, whalers began mass killing sea mammals to produce oil for heat and light in their cities and towns, and the fur traders relied on the mass killing of animals for their economy, too. The third wave was the schools and missionaries who sought to wipe Indigenous peoples of their knowledge systems, identity, language, and ways of life. This was accompanied by forced settlement living and, for Inuit, government programs such as the dog slaughter, which involved the systematic killing off of the dog teams we relied on. Finally, the anti-fur movement decimated the one economic avenue Inuit pursued in the transition to settlement living.

Collectively, these impacts compounded and created deep dependency and poverty in Inuit communities. The conditions that we live with today.

Illustration Credit: 'Moon Spirit II,' Etching and Aquatint, 2005, by Germaine Arnaktauyok

*At night, Kaujjajjuk would sleep on the porch with the dogs, even in the coldest winter. There were two dogs that were most tame that he would sleep with to keep warm; he called them qipiarjuk ("the little blanket") and qarakjualuuk ("the pad"). It would be very crowded on the porch with the dogs. Before sleeping, Kaujjajjuk would look up to the moon and sing to its spirit.*

*The whole community treated him ill, chanting to him, "Kaujjajjualuk, naunginnaa uirisautiksatuinnaq?" ("Where is that Kaujjajjuk, the one whose only purpose is to be teased?") But there were two women who treated him well. One of them made him a small knife, which he kept hidden.*

*With a sense of worthlessness and almost complete oppression, how does one survive the ordeal spiritually, mentally, and physically?*

With kinship ties to families and the land severed, Inuit were like orphans, removed from the means to look after ourselves. While the colony's wealth grew, Inuit became impoverished as our sense of self and how we look after ourselves dwindled. Our interdependency and sense of community have been undermined by lateral violence, which has largely been normalized. Lateral violence is when we act out our internalized colonialism and turn on each other through gossip, verbal assaults, judging, undermining, and passive-aggressive or generally intimidating behaviour.

**If dehumanization was and is the means to control our lives, the antidote to regaining control is one that is humanizing: claiming identity, love and care for our kin and community, especially through committing not to partake in lateral violence.**

## NOW

To start deconstructing colonialist ideas, especially if we are to pursue self-government, it is imperative to consider what an economy is and what and who it is for from the grounding of Inuit belief systems.

The starting point here is to examine our relationships with sila (a complex word often simplified to "weather force" or "sky"), nuna (land), and tariuq (ocean). We must then ask what it means to look after ourselves within those relationships and focus on the values that are integral to Inuit philosophy: reciprocity, gratitude, reverence, and stewardship. For example, if we look after nuna, it will look after us; if we damage nuna, we are doing damage to ourselves. Nuna is an extension of our being; we are part of our natural environment, and it is part of us.

Inuit are a hunting society. That is our economy. The hunting and harvesting economy is not just for food but also for overall social, spiritual, and cultural well-being. Colonialism distorts that and dismisses it because it doesn't fit within its narrow extractive ethos.

> **Colonialism almost never exploits the entire country. It is content with extracting natural resources and exporting them to the metropolitan industries, thereby enabling a specific sector to grow relatively wealthy, while the rest of the colony continues, or rather sinks, into underdevelopment and poverty.**[3]

Despite being relegated to the "under-developed," for Inuit, a hunting economy is still integral to our lives and our path to food sovereignty. Inuit are reclaiming power in the food system by rebuilding the knowledge base and relationships between people and the land, as well as between harvesters, Elders, their kin and community.

Reclaiming our food system strengthens our connections to the values, philosophy and laws by which we live and through which we can address underlying social disparities that cause food insecurity. Our hunting economy supports our own needs by supplying healthy and culturally based foods, and it is a practice of self-determination that creates jobs, markets, and economic opportunities and ensures Inuit continue to access our land, knowledge, and food-sharing practices.

However, in capitalist and colonial systems, a land-based hunting economy rooted in Indigenous self-determination is not an easy argument to make. As noted by the international peasant movement, La Via Campesina, at the World Food Summit in 1996, "food sovereignty is rooted in the ongoing global struggles over control of food, land, water, and livelihoods."

We are told that food comes from trade, economies of scale, and competitive advantage. We are told this is because local control of the global food supply is discouraged. We are expected to trust that Northmart stores fairly distribute and price our food because they receive federal funding from programs such as Nutrition North, which subsidizes shipped food, to do so. For federal programming, Nutrition North is the main and only consistent food security program. There is no permanent funding to support hunting as a food source or employment, even though it is a reliable and culturally relevant food system.

Encouragingly, there is a growing movement in Nunavut to build a hunting economy as a livelihood and economic base. Programs like Angunasuktiit, run by the Ittaq Heritage and Research Centre in Clyde River, were used as a model by the Qikiqtani Inuit Association to create the Nauttiqsuqtiit — Inuit stewards who are part of a monitoring system for the Tallurutiup Imanga Marine

Conservation Area. And now, multiple community men's groups see the value in men regaining their hunting and land skills to pursue healing and reclamation. These programs exist in Rankin Inlet, Iqaluit, Kugluktuk, Pangnirtung and, most recently, in Cape Dorset. The Pirurvik Centre in Iqaluit has been instrumental in assisting the groups' development. The Government of Nunavut has also launched the Atii Anguti program, which supports men's groups across the territory, and recently, Nunavut's Minister of Family Services, the Honourable Margaret Nakashuk, said in the Legislative Assembly, "I have tasked my officials to begin the work to create full-time hunter positions, young hunter mentorship programs, and community hunts to make country food more accessible to Elders."[4] There are also hunting skills programs in communities, such as the Young Hunter's program in Arviat. This commitment to preserving our traditional way of life and affirming that we're a hunting society is being seen as instrumental to our vision of the future economy.

The arrival of Kaujjajjuk's spiritual helper helped him to reclaim his power.

*Late one night, Kaujjajjuk heard people arriving. He then heard someone sternly command, "People have arrived; Kaujjajjuk go outside." He was a child, so he was scared to listen to a stranger and go outside. But he had to listen to adults. He told each of his dogs to go outside (in those days, animals and humans could speak to each other), and the dogs each responded, "You go outside instead."*

*When Kaujjajjuk finally left the iglu to face the stern voice that had called for him, he nervously started to sing, "I went out instead." The visitor told Kaujjajjuk he wanted to whip him. Kaujjajjuk did not want to be whipped because he knew it would hurt. But, again, he had to listen, so he thought, "Never mind. If it has to be so, then so be it." Kaujjajjuk was used to being tormented. The visitor started to whip him, and it was very painful. Because the visitor wanted it to be so, so it was.*

*Every time the whip cracked, Kaujjajjuk grew bigger. Each time, the visitor would ask him, "Young being, have you not grown?" Kaujjajjuk would respond in acknowledgement, "I have developed; I have grown."*

*After several whips, Kaujjajjuk had grown so much that he was bigger than all the other people in the camp. After the mysterious visitor's job was done, they flew away. The visitor was the moon's spirit. Kaujjajjuk's songs had been heard.*

*With his new size, Kaujjajjuk could finally convey his anger at being mistreated. He stood up and broke through the roof of the porch. Then, when the villagers called for him, Kaujjajjuk responded, "Here he is! The one to be teased; the one you villagers are to compete with at teasing. Tease away (uirisaliritti); compete away (parlatitsaliritti)."*

*When Kaujjajjuk appeared as a very big man, some of the shocked observers started to flee. Someone shouted, "Kaujjajjuk has suddenly grown!" Another person, who could not believe how large the boy had become, responded, "Let him!" The villagers quickly conspired to tie Kaujjajjuk down and leave him for the nanuq (polar bear) to attack while they continued to taunt and tease him.*

*However, when the big polar bears arrived, Kaujjajjuk grabbed them by their hind legs, hit them against the ground and threw them away. He then grabbed the men by their legs and hit them against the ground, too. Kaujjajjuk went on a rampage and, in his madness, accidentally killed one of the women who had been kind to him. Kaujjajjuk deeply regretted harming her and realized how powerful and overwhelming anger can be.*

## RECLAMATION

Hunting, as a livelihood and a path to healing, will eventually become commonplace in Nunavut and Inuit Nunangat as part of the larger work towards self-determination. However, infrastructure for country food processing will be required in our communities. There must be broader thinking around food sovereignty because, currently, food subsidy programs do not benefit the communities but rather the retail companies. The byproducts of hunting, such as seal skins and oil, will also need to be processed. This is only the beginning.

With the current average Inuit income being just over $28,000 a year (2021 census), most Inuit do not have the economic means to buy equipment to go out on the land, let alone work to create this vision. We must work together to create and access resources, programs, and knowledge for our version of Land Back.

**Kaujjajjuk's story teaches us that anger is powerful and, when uncontrolled, dangerous. Therefore, as we regain agency and sovereignty through our way of life, we must not act in vengeance. Instead, we must turn our anger into constructive power.**

The colonial system will continue to try to oppress and control us. We need to be mindful not to hurt others, especially each other and our allies. We must diligently work through our historical mistreatment through healing and wellness programs. We cannot forget our spiritual helper, the land, and that our songs will manifest our power and vision.

# PART 01
# Contextualizing the Northern Economy

# Editors' Introduction: What is the Northern Economy?

Kaujjajjuk reflects the contemporary experience of Inuit in Nunavut.

The overwhelming force of colonialism drives communities trying to survive and to heal to the limit. How can you define an economy in this context? As Kunuk suggests in the preface, it is by growing large, taking up space, and intervening in conversations designed to marginalize and ostracize. For a long time, Inuit and Northern Indigenous peoples generally have not had a voice in the discussions around conceptualizing economic development. Canadian governments, industry, and non-Indigenous consultants — this trilateral colonialism of the North — make those decisions.

However, as Inuit and Northern Indigenous people generally challenge the common sense of economic activity as it has emerged over the past few years, a cleavage has become apparent. While resource development and the service economy dominate discussions of wealth, value, and GDP, questions about how these align with Inuit values and self-determination are emerging. How do concepts such as "don't take more than what you need," "respect the rights of the land," "reciprocity and sharing among and between families and communities," and "care-based strategies for meeting needs" factor into our discussions of economy?

There are land claim agreements, supposed "de facto" self-government, devolution, impact benefit agreements, and all manner of institutional arrangements meant to share power. Still, they stubbornly do not translate to Inuit leadership. Meanwhile, a largely invisible (or at least largely unacknowledged) economy of hunting, art, and care operates in tandem – but precariously.

This is the cleavage we speak of.

**This report is by no means a comprehensive report on self-determined economy, but rather a start of a conversation on what that means, or could mean, to expand it.**

There are many reports and explorations on Northern Economy, most often centred around extractive industries that further disconnect Inuit from their values and systems, and past economic systems have caused further disparity between Inuit and non-Inuit, with most of the money flowing to the south. There is minimal discussion about what Land Back and Cash Back mean for Inuit and the North. This report explores these concepts.

Further, this report is not just a contribution to the conversation but an active intervention. It aims to center Inuit voices on the Northern Economy, its distinct sectors, modern challenges, and transformative opportunities. Through a combination of historical context, contemporary analysis, reflections, and visions for the future, this report aims to provide alternative conceptualizations of economic activity to shift the narrative and drive toward significant change in the common sense approach to the economy.

**Part 01** introduces the path that Inuit, in particular, have walked thus far and considers the current economic landscape. Matthias Oschinsky provides a broad analysis of the orthodox economic development prescriptions and their failure to deliver the promise of an Inuit-led economy where Inuit struggle to see themselves reflected. Siila Watt Cloutier reflects on the historical and current transformations in the Northern economy, advocating for a holistic approach that integrates cultural, spiritual, and economic well-being. These two chapters offer a contextual foundation for the more reflective or advocacy-focused chapters that follow.

**Part 02** focuses on the Inuit's much older economic activities as expressed in a contemporary Nunavut. Jae Lightfoot and Hayden King discuss the critical role of hunter education programs in ensuring food security and maintaining Indigenous knowledge. Esa Qillaq shares personal experiences and insights into the life of a full-time hunter, emphasizing the importance of hunting practices for food security knowledge and cultural preservation. Jason Akearok examines the complexities of fisheries' rights, highlighting the challenges and opportunities for sustainable development in the region. Richard Paton explores the potential of a conservation-based economy, advocating for practices that balance ecological preservation with economic development.

**Part 03** explores the diversity of Inuit economic activities beyond hunting or mining, with a focus on the arts, small business development, and the economy of care. Barbara Akoak reflects on her experiences in the art and craft sector against the backdrop of mass commercialization and Northern monopolies. Laakkuluk Williamson Bathory and Kunuk Inutiq discuss the impacts of decolonial art on challenging and transforming destructive economic practices. Romani Makkik reflects on meaningful work and challenges readers to consider the connections between economy and healing.

We recognize there are gaps in the report, such as further exploring what caring for our people on our terms means for us, including looking after our children, their education, and creating safety nets to prevent them from going into care; looking after our Elders based on our values, and analyzing our health and justice systems. Because, importantly, "the economy" cannot be easily extracted from our lived realities, and attention must be paid to the politics and economy of society more generally.

But more specific to the traditional conceptualization of economic activity, we have not considered a number of sectors critically: tourism and economic benefits (or harms); the often extractive industry of science and research and the growing leadership of Inuit in this area; the potential for a knowledge economy, and the impacts and benefits of Indigenous data sovereignty; or, whether business development initiatives do enough to support entrepreneurship and create private businesses when major service gaps exist, such as with banking within smaller communities. Nor have we examined energy and the economy of power.

So there is work to do. However, the perspectives within this report offer a holistic approach to understanding the Northern economy that is self-determined by Inuit and examples of transformation. If we are to truly recover from the grips of colonialism and its trail of destruction, we need to control and manage what happens on our lands and on our terms.

MATTHIAS OSCHINSKY

# The Current State of the Northern Economy for Inuit in Nunavut

What is the current state of the northern economy, with specific attention to Inuit in Nunavut? This chapter attempts to answer this question.

The first part of this chapter focuses on the nature of the so-called "mixed economy," where governments support mining and resource development but offer very little space for Inuit-led economic activity, and questions whether the strong bias towards mining is justified when considering socioeconomic outcomes for Nunavut's population. Government support for mining far outweighs that of other sectors, yet its benefits to the local population are modest.

The second section examines the labour market and the extent to which Inuit are involved and benefit from the existing Northern Economy. It draws a comparison between government support for skills development for the wage economy and support for culture and language, with a particular emphasis on the latter. As demonstrated by the rest of the report, investments in language education could provide the foundation for Inuit-led economic activity, which is grounded in Inuit culture.

Based on the results of this analysis, it is clear that a re-think of the economic development approach in the Northern Economy is warranted. This re-evaluation should strongly focus on Nunavut's traditional economic sectors: harvesting, arts, and the language that underlies their effective practice. Beyond the economic benefits, these sectors play a pivotal role in cultural revitalization and community building. Moreover, hunting and harvesting significantly contribute to food security and food sovereignty, further justifying the need for change.

## THE "MIXED" ECONOMY

**When discussing Nunavut's economy, it is important to keep in mind that it is, in essence, a dual one.**

Specifically, we can distinguish between formal (wage-based) and traditional (land-based) economies. Economic assessments commonly focus on the former with an emphasis on employment, wages, and GDP growth.

Since mining is the largest private sector employer in the territory, it receives comparatively more attention than most other sectors. In contrast, Nunavut's traditional sectors, such as hunting and arts, receive relatively little consideration in economic studies. Similarly, this can be seen in the case of government support for Nunavut's industrial sectors. As Caine and Krogman (2010) and Rodon and Lévesque (2015) note, the predominant emphasis on economic investment in the Northern economies tends to revolve around job creation through natural resource exploration and extraction.

The divergent treatment of Nunavut's mining sector compared to its traditional ones raises the question of whether the significant difference in support of mining is actually justified. Put differently, what are the socioeconomic benefits of mining compared to the traditional sectors of Nunavut's population? And should the land-based economy receive more attention and support from policymakers?

## GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

While specific data on sectoral subsidies is difficult to come by, official information suggests that government support of the mining sector is substantial. The 2023 federal budget set aside $1.5 billion to launch a critical minerals infrastructure fund and proposed a 30 percent tax credit for extracting and processing critical minerals.[1] Budget 2024 expanded this with $3.8 billion for a Critical Minerals Strategy.[2]

The significant tax credits come on top of deductions for exploration expenses. Canadian exploration expenses (CEEs) refer to the costs incurred when determining the existence, location, extent, or quality of mineral resources, petroleum, or natural gas in Canada. The notable thing about CEEs is that they are deductible to 100 percent in the same year they occur. In other words, businesses can immediately subtract the entire amount from their taxable income. Additionally, if there are any unused expenses, they can be carried forward indefinitely or transferred to investors through so-called flow-through shares.[3]

Below are figures for exploration and deposit appraisals from 2020 to 2022 in Nunavut. Total expenditures amounted to $143.2 million in 2022. Approximately 70 percent of this amount, a total of $100.24 million, was spent on exploration.[4]

**TABLE 1**

**Exploration and deposit appraisal expenditures Nunavut, 2020-2022**

| YEAR | EXPLORATION (millions) | DEPOSIT APPRAISAL (millions) | TOTAL (millions) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2020 | $49.49 | $21.21 | $70.7 |
| 2021 | $104.44 | $44.76 | $149.2 |
| 2022 | $100.24 | $42.96 | $143.2 |

SOURCE: NATURAL RESOURCES CANADA: MINERALS AND THE ECONOMY[5]

**Meanwhile, there is also data on the loss in corporate income tax for the 100 percent deduction of exploration expenses. Assuming a 12 percent corporate income tax, the lost tax revenue for Nunavut in 2022 alone amounts to roughly $12 million. For the past three years, the total loss is around $30.5 million.**

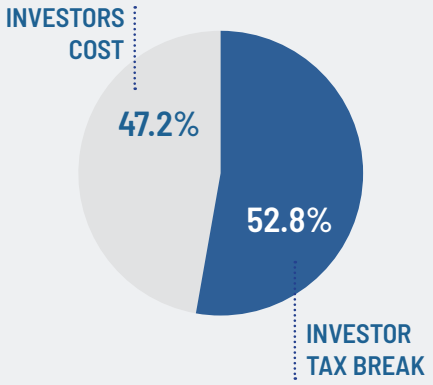
**TABLE 2**

**Estimating loss in corporate income tax revenue for Nunavut due to CEE deductions**

| YEAR | LOSS IN CORPORATE INCOME TAX REVENUE (millions) | TOTAL LOSS FROM '20 - '22 (millions) |
|---|---|---|
| 2020 | $5,938,800 | $30,500,400 |
| 2021 | $12, 532,800 | |
| 2022 | $12,028,800 | |

As mentioned, these deductions come on top of tax credits from so-called flow-through shares (FTS). Simply put, an FTS is a way for a business involved in mineral exploration and development in Canada to raise funds. When a company issues FTS, it allows them to pass on certain expenses to the shareholders, which are then treated as if the investor, not the company, had incurred them. This arrangement can help lower the investor's taxable income.

**Nunavut leads in this regard.**
**In 2022, the cost of a $1,000 investment in FTS was $472. In other words, Nunavut allows investors to pay less than half the full cost of their investment in mining.**




These figures combined illustrate considerable support for the mining sector. In contrast, the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor) recently announced that it would provide a total of $556,866 over two years to support Nunavut's hunters and trappers organizations.[6]

While it is commendable that public officials recognize the importance of supporting Nunavut's land-based economy, there is a striking disparity in government support between the mining sector and the traditional economy.

Looking simply at employment numbers, one could argue that the mining sector supports considerably more jobs in Nunavut than in hunting or arts. According to the latest census data, out of a total workforce of 13,255 people, around 400 work in mining, 250 in arts, entertainment, and recreation, and 150 in agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting. However, these statistics fail to capture the true magnitude of Nunavut's land-based and art economy (demonstrated below), nor do they account for the overall impact of each sector on the economy, including their interdependence with other sectors.

## THE BENEFITS TO NUNAVUT

Instead of focusing solely on GDP, wages, or employment numbers to assess the importance of a specific sector for an economic region, it is more valuable to consider the sector's interdependence with the broader regional economy; this gives us a better understanding of its benefits to the region through its interconnectedness with other sectors.

One of the key tools in understanding this interdependence is the concept of economic multipliers. When a new investment or spending occurs in a specific sector or industry, it creates a ripple effect, impacting other parts of the economy. These ripples are known as economic multipliers.

Let's say a company decides to build a new factory in a town. This investment will create direct job opportunities in the construction industry. But it doesn't stop there. The construction workers will spend their wages on groceries, restaurants, and other local businesses, which, in turn, creates additional jobs and income for those businesses and their employees. The employees of these businesses will then spend their earnings elsewhere, creating further economic activity.

**Economic multipliers measure this ripple effect by showing how one initial investment or spending generates additional economic activity and income. Essentially, it's a way to understand the broader impacts and benefits of an investment or expenditure beyond just the direct effects.**

## Two commonly used measures to estimate the contribution of a specific sector to the local economy: Job Multipliers and Labour Income Multipliers.

**A JOB MULTIPLIER** shows the total number of additional jobs created in the regional economy for a further investment of $1 million in a specific industry. Investments in industries with higher job multipliers are likely to increase overall employment more than those with lower job ones, thus creating more benefits for the economic region overall. Figure 1 presents the top five job multipliers by industry in Nunavut and compares those with the mining industry.

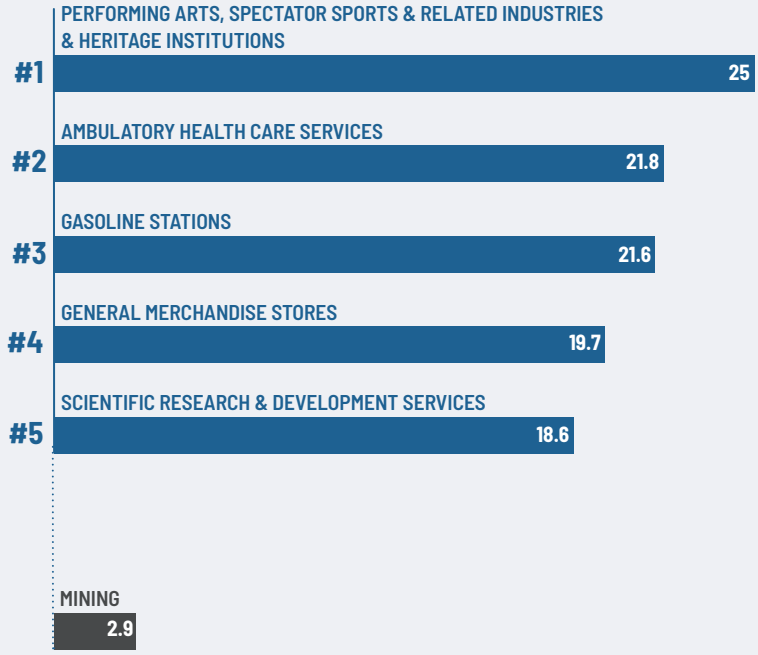
As shown, performing arts, spectator sports and related industries, and heritage institutions have the highest job multiplier, with a value of 25. This means that for every $1 million investment in that sector, an additional 25 jobs are created throughout the economy.

**THE LABOUR INCOME MULTIPLIER** measures the change in overall labour income for one additional dollar of output.

Figure 2 shows that with a value of 1.5, scientific research and development services have the highest labour income multiplier, followed by performing arts, spectator sports and related industries, and heritage institutions with a total labour income multiplier of 1.

**FIGURE 1**
**Top Five Job Multipliers for Selected Industries in Nunavut, 2019**

For every $1 million investment in mining an additional **2.9 jobs** are created throughout the economy in comparison to **25 jobs** per 1 million invested in the Performing Arts.




SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, TABLE: 36-10-0595-01.

**FIGURE 2**
**Top Five Labour Multipliers for Selected Industries in Nunavut, 2019**

A multiplier of 1.5 means that for every $1 of economic activity, workers receive $1.50 in total wages and salaries across the economy.


SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, TABLE: 36-10-0595-01.

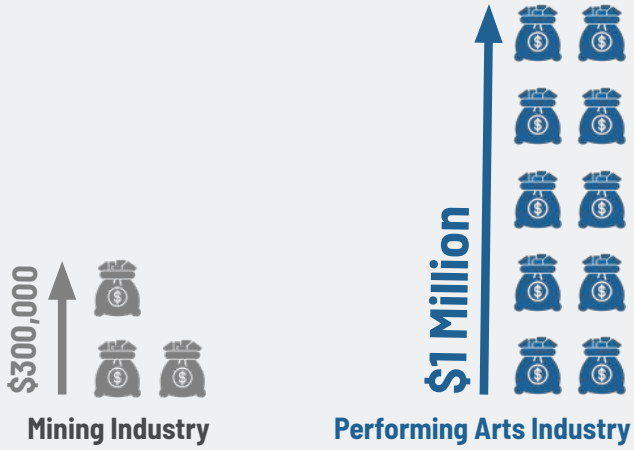
**FIGURE 3**

**Labour Income Increase Comparison**

**One million dollar investment in the Performing Arts Industry vs. Mining Industry**

The labour multiplier for the mining industry is 0.3 in Nunavut. This means that for every $1 million investment, the in the mining industry would increase total labour income by **$300,000**.

In contrast, a $1 million investment in the performing arts industry increased total labour income across the territory by **$1 million**.




**These figures demonstrate that while significant support for the mining industry might be valuable from a national perspective, communities in Nunavut do not experience this value to the same degree.**

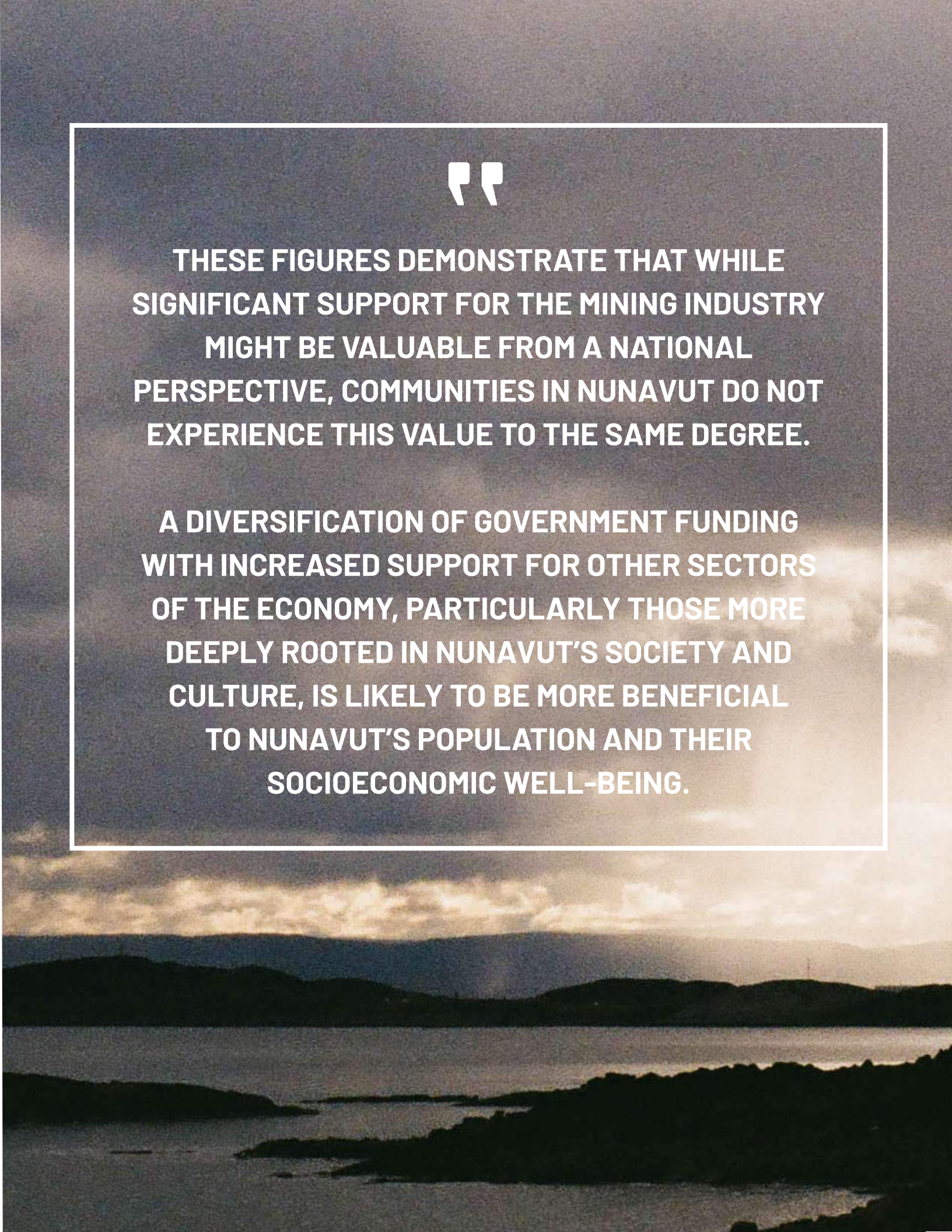
A diversification of government funding with increased support for other sectors of the economy, particularly those more deeply rooted in Nunavut's society and culture, is likely to be more beneficial to Nunavut's population and their socioeconomic well-being.

Indeed, these findings are confirmed by a recent study on the impact of mining on Indigenous communities. Berman et al. (2020) assess the benefits of a mining partnership between the Northwest Alaska Native Association and Teck Resources, a Canada-based company, over 14 years. They sum up their sobering results as follows:

> **The benefits to local residents, although lasting and significant given the limited opportunities in the region, accounted for a relatively modest share of total employment and earnings.**
>
> **The relatively modest benefits received by local Indigenous residents, even in the favorable circumstances of the Red Dog case, suggest that one may need to temper expectations about what extractive industry development can achieve for Indigenous communities.**
>
> (BERMAN ET AL., 2020, P.8)

Based on the analysis conducted thus far, it is evident that a re-evaluation of government support for Nunavut's economy is necessary. As Berman et al. note, overall limited opportunities for the local population contribute to the modest benefits of mining. A plausible conclusion drawn from this observation is that prioritizing the expansion and diversification of overall economic opportunities would yield more favourable outcomes.

Furthermore, as we consider the positive impacts of the traditional economy, the socioeconomic benefits of such a rethinking become even more apparent.



"

THESE FIGURES DEMONSTRATE THAT WHILE SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT FOR THE MINING INDUSTRY MIGHT BE VALUABLE FROM A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE, COMMUNITIES IN NUNAVUT DO NOT EXPERIENCE THIS VALUE TO THE SAME DEGREE.

A DIVERSIFICATION OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING WITH INCREASED SUPPORT FOR OTHER SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY, PARTICULARLY THOSE MORE DEEPLY ROOTED IN NUNAVUT'S SOCIETY AND CULTURE, IS LIKELY TO BE MORE BENEFICIAL TO NUNAVUT'S POPULATION AND THEIR SOCIOECONOMIC WELL-BEING.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ART AND HARVESTING FOR NUNAVUT'S ECONOMY

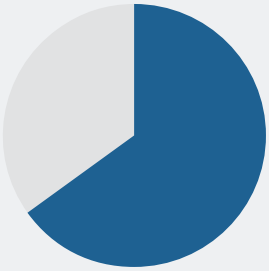
The term "livelihoods" is often used to describe the various ways in which Inuit families earn a living and support themselves. This term goes beyond wage employment and includes activities such as food harvesting, goods production, artwork, and handicrafts. As such, by extending our focus to include the land-based economy, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the Inuit economy (Anderson et al., 2016).

Nunavut's land-based, or traditional, economy can be divided into two main sectors:

1. Hunting and harvesting activities; and
2. Arts and crafts.

Data from the 2017 Indigenous People's Survey indicate the level of participation in these activities.[7]

**FIGURE 4**
**The Number of People involved in Hunting and Harvesting Activities in Nunavut**



**65%**

**or 12,900 survey participants reported they engage in Hunting, Fishing or Trapping**

**37%**

**or 7,300 survey participants indicated they had gathered wild plants**

**FIGURE 5**
**The Number of People involved in Arts and Crafts in Nunavut**

**Almost**

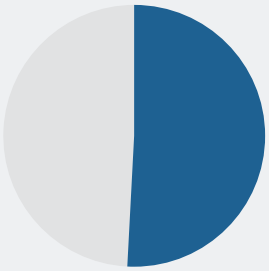
**7,000**

**of survey participants were involved with making clothing or footwear.**

**Almost**

**3,400**

**survey participants produced artwork.**



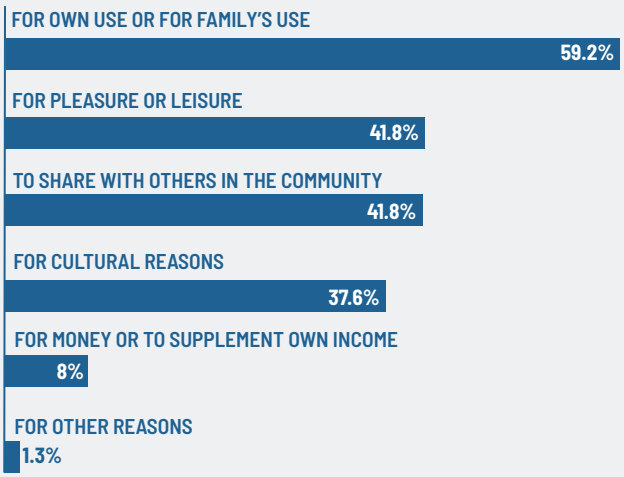
**Taken together,**

**51%**

**of survey participants were involved in arts and crafts.**

**FIGURE 6**

**Reasons for participating in harvesting activities in Nunavut, 2017**

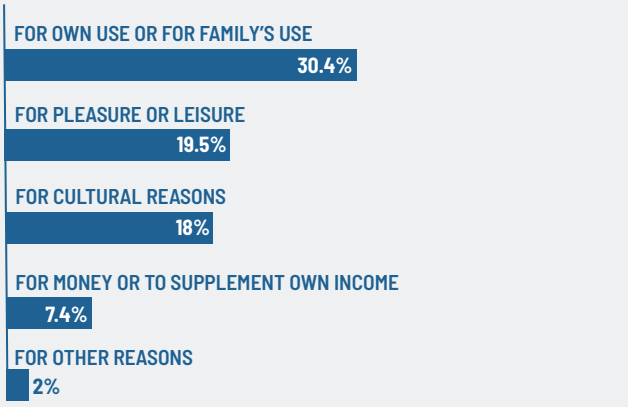



SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, 41-10-0046-01

Figure 6 shows us that only a minority of survey respondents hunt, fish, or trap to generate income. Almost 60 percent of those involved in hunting did so for their own or their family's use, followed by around 42 percent who did so for pleasure or leisure and to share with others in the community. Around 38 percent also cited cultural reasons.

**FIGURE 7**

**Reasons for participating in arts and crafts in Nunavut, 2017**




SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, 41-10-0047-01

A similar picture emerges with the reasons for participating in the arts. As Figure 7 shows, the main reasons are creating something for one's own or one's family's use (30.4 percent), participating for pleasure or leisure (19.5 percent), and for cultural reasons (18 percent). Again, income generation does not play a significant role.[8]

## What does the data tell us about Northern participation in the land-based economy?

Participation in the land-based economy, then, exceeds purely monetary motives and is vital for family life and culture in Nunavut. Yet, recent research shows that it also generates significant socioeconomic benefits.

Studying Nunavut's hunting sector, Warltier et al. (2021) determine the value of Nunavut's country food by considering the amount and nutritional content of harvested country food alongside the nutritional composition and local prices of store-bought alternatives.

**They find that 17 out of 21 Nunavut communities harvest enough country food to meet the protein requirements of all community members.**

Specifically, Nunavut's country food system annually gathers five million kilograms of protein-rich food from various regions across the territory. The purchase value of the equivalent amount of protein from stores would cost approximately $198 million. In addition, the authors emphasize that the value of the country food system extends beyond monetary worth; it holds profound cultural and nutritional significance.

Studies by Searles (2016) and Kenny and Chan (2017) confirm that hunting and harvesting activities in Nunavut are a key contributor to food security. This finding is pertinent since data shows that Canada's Indigenous population is significantly more likely to be affected by food insecurity compared to the overall population (see Figure 8). Indeed, the share of the Indigenous population suffering from moderate or severe food insecurity is more than double that of the non-Indigenous population.

**FIGURE 8**

## Percentage of Moderate or Severe Food Insecurity: Indigenous vs. Non-Indigenous populations

**25.5%**
of the Indigenous population experience food insecurity.

**12.5 %**
of the non-Indigenous population experience food insecurity.

The share of the Indigenous population suffering from moderate or severe food insecurity is **more than double** that of the non-Indigenous population.

SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, TABLE: 13-10-0835-01.

The important contribution of Nunavut's hunting and harvesting activities to the socioeconomic well-being of the local population is further highlighted in a recent report by the Future Skills Centre (2023). The report, citing George Wenzel's work, emphasized the stark comparison in value of investment in local hunting and harvesting versus money spent at Northern grocery stores, as seen in Figure 9.

Beyond this, the Future Skills Centre report underscores the crucial role of hunters in facilitating access to land-based activities, which hold deep significance for Inuit livelihoods and culture. Yet, their expertise often goes unrecognized when measuring Northern economic growth and their capabilities are often overshadowed by the preference for formal credentials and workplace experience in wage-based employment.

**FIGURE 9**

## HOW FAR DOES $50 GO?

### A Comparison between Local Hunting and Harvesting vs. Grocery Store Purchases in Northern communities


### Local Hunting and Harvesting

An investment of just **$50** in local hunting and harvesting generates a supply of country food that could feed **20 individuals**.

### Local Grocery Store

**$50** spent at local Northern grocery stores would provide meat for **fewer than four individuals**, with the meat likely being less fresh and lacking the cultural value associated with traditional food sources.

## THE LABOUR MARKET, SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, AND LANGUAGE

Regarding wage-based employment, this analysis considers the scope and nature of Inuit involvement in the Nunavut labour market, which is characterized by significant inequality between the Inuit and non-Inuit populations. While the Inuit population accounts for roughly 73 percent of the total labour force in Nunavut, overall opportunities are severely limited to relatively lower-paid jobs. This results in substantial wage inequality and poor economic prospects for Inuit. Moreover, empirical evidence suggests the existence of labour market barriers and discrimination against Inuit workers.

Differences in unemployment rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous[9] groups do not decline significantly with higher educational attainment, and wage gaps exist between the two groups for all levels of educational attainment.

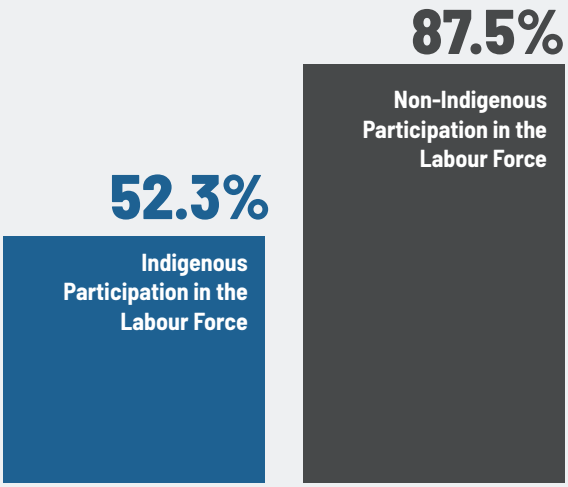
Next to a narrow focus on formal credentials, the profound differences in educational outcomes among the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations appear to result from the prevailing educational approach. With the exception of one French-language school, all schools in Nunavut operate in English.[10] Given the ample empirical evidence demonstrating that integrating Indigenous language in Indigenous schools significantly improves student well-being and learning outcomes, creating an Inuktut-language education system should be a policy priority.

These policies should be part of an approach that works towards the self-determination of Nunavut's Inuit population.

### Inequality in Labour Market Outcomes

Among individuals aged 15 and higher, around 52 percent of Indigenous people are in the labour force compared to roughly 87 percent of the non-Indigenous population. More importantly, employment figures for non-Indigenous people are significantly higher. Around 85 percent of the non-Indigenous labour force is employed compared to roughly 41 percent of the Indigenous labour force. As a consequence, the unemployment rate among the Indigenous population is almost nine percentage points higher than that of the non-Indigenous population.

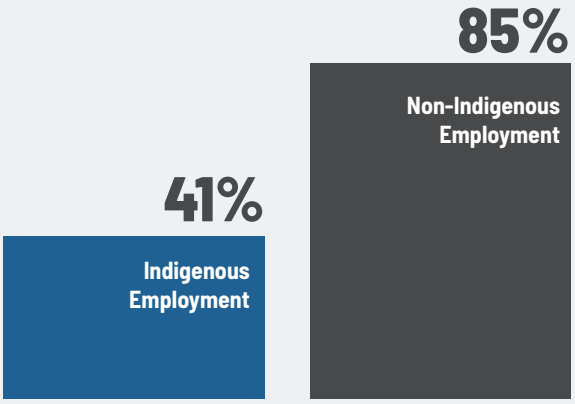
**FIGURE 10**
**Participation of Indigenous People vs Non-Indigenous Population in the Labour Force**




Among individuals aged 15 and higher, around **52.3 percent** of Indigenous people are in the labour force compared to roughly **87 percent** of the non-Indigenous population.

SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA: TABLE 98-10-0451-01.

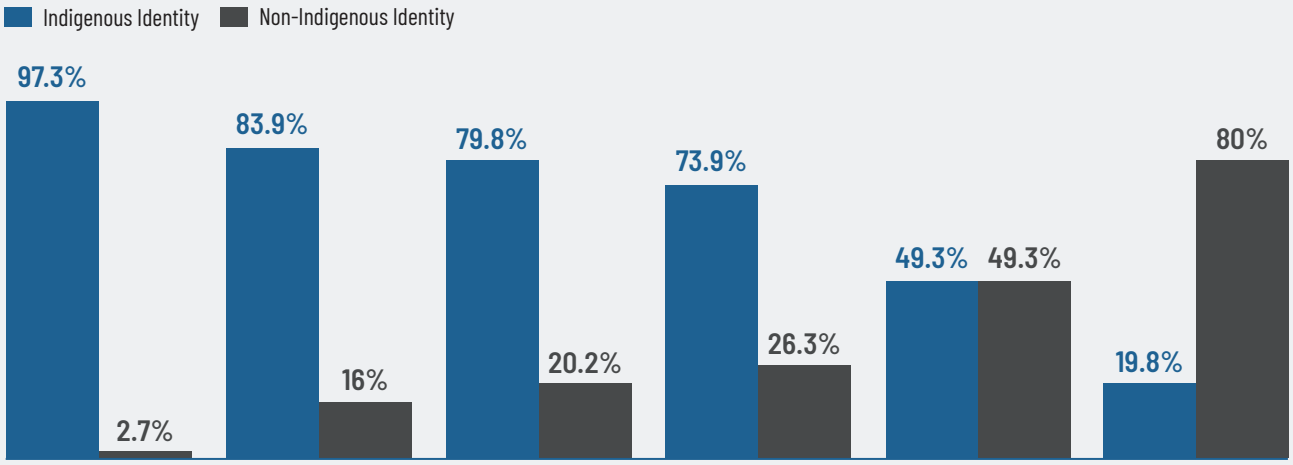
**FIGURE 11**
**Employment Figures for Indigenous People vs Non-Indigenous Population**




Around 85 percent of the non-Indigenous labour force is employed compared to roughly 41 percent of the Indigenous labour force.

SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA: TABLE 98-10-0451-01.

**FIGURE 11**
**Labour Force Participation by Highest Educational Achievement**




SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, TABLE: 98-10-0428-01.

This uneven split in employment can be a result of educational outcomes. As Figure 11 shows, among those with no certificate, diploma, or degree, around 97 percent are Indigenous. Similarly, percentage shares among the Indigenous population are significantly higher among those whose highest educational achievement is a high school diploma or equivalent, those with an apprenticeship or trades certificate, and those with a non-university certificate. Figure 11 also shows that the number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people with an associate degree (a university degree below bachelor level) is the same at 49.3 percent. In contrast, among those with a bachelor's degree or higher, only 20 percent are Indigenous.

While it is likely that these differences in educational achievement account for some of the disparities in Nunavut's labour market with respect to Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, they are also the result of a degree-based labour market. Certificates and formal educational achievements are still commonly used to signal skills and competencies, whereas valuable skills gained in other ways tend to be overlooked.

As a recent report on Nunavut's mixed economy points out:

> **Hunters have expertise in land-based activities, which aren't typically accounted for in labour market forecasts or measures of Northern economic growth. And despite the fact that life in the Arctic requires strong skill sets, hunters' skills are often not recognized as legitimate qualifications for jobs in the wage economy. Instead, employers tend to privilege formal credentials and workplace experience.** (FUTURE SKILLS CENTRE, 2023: P. 7.)

In addition to a narrow focus on formal credentials, the profound differences in educational outcomes among Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations might also result from the prevailing educational approach — a topic discussed in more detail below.

Labour market choices and outcomes reflect the differences in educational attainment. Among the top ten occupations with the highest shares of Indigenous people in Nunavut, the top five have a total Indigenous employment share of 100 percent. Moreover, with the exception of supervisors in natural resources, agriculture and related production (median annual income: $80,000) and general trades (median annual income: $52,000), the median employment incomes for the remaining occupations are well below $40,000 per annum. In fact, calculating the average of all median annual incomes for these occupations amounts to just $28,640 per year.

With the exception of one French-language school, all schools in Nunavut operate in English.[10] Given the ample empirical evidence demonstrating that integrating Indigenous language in Indigenous schools significantly improves student well-being and learning outcomes, creating an Inuktut-language education system should be a policy priority.

These policies should be part of an approach that works towards the self-determination of Nunavut's Inuit population.

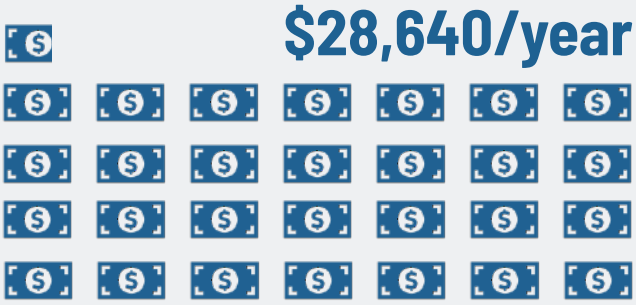
Photo Credit: Shari Fox

In addition to a narrow focus on formal credentials, the profound differences in educational outcomes among Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations might also result from the prevailing educational approach — a topic discussed in more detail below. Labour market choices and outcomes reflect the differences in educational attainment.

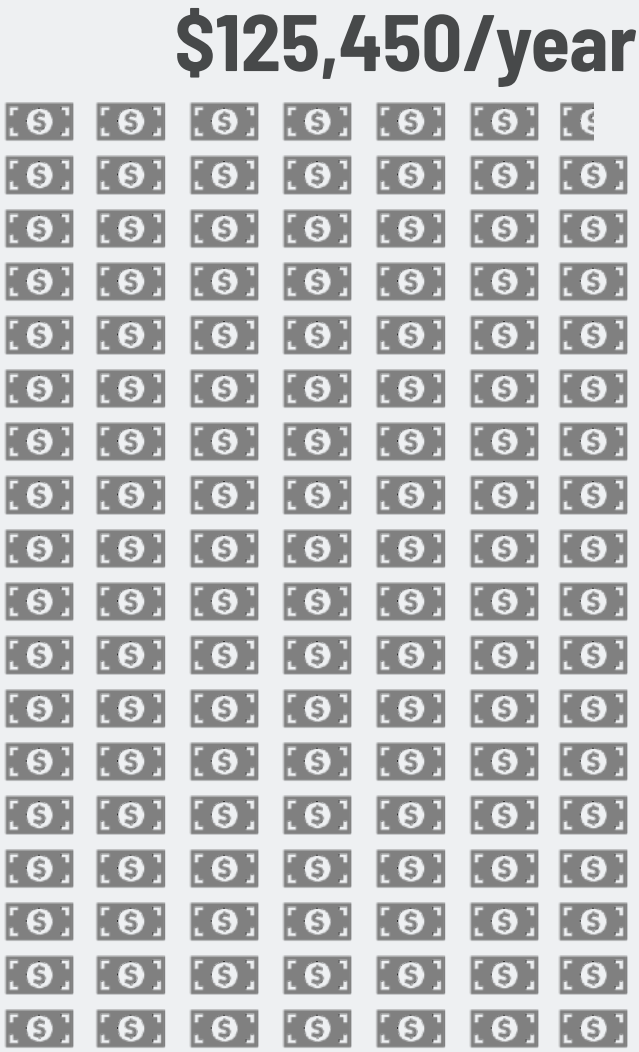
Among the top ten occupations with the highest shares of Indigenous people in Nunavut, the top five have a total Indigenous employment share of 100 percent:

1. Supervisors in natural resources, agriculture and related production
2. Occupations in natural resources and related production
3. Workers in natural resources, agriculture and related production
4. Harvesting, landscaping and natural resources labourers
5. Machine operators, assemblers and inspectors in processing, manufacturing and printing

**FIGURE 12**
**A Comparison of Average Median Annual Incomes for Top Occupations with the Highest Shares of Indigenous vs. Non-Indigenous People**




The average of all median incomes for eight of the top ten occupations with the highest shares of Indigenous people in Nunavut amounts to just **$28,640** per year.




The average of all median annual incomes for the top ten occupations with the highest shares of non-Indigenous people amounts to **$125,450** per year.

**TABLE 3**
**Percentage of Indigenous Employment by Industry and Highest Educational Attainment in Nunavut, 2021**

| Highest certificate, diploma or degree | Construction | Educational services | Health care and social assistance | Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction | Public | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No certificate, diploma or degree | 2.6 | 3.7 | 4.6 | 2.5 | 9.8 | **23.2** |
| High (secondary) school diploma or equivalency certificate | 1.9 | 2.5 | 2.3 | 0.6 | 7.9 | **15.2** |
| College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma | 0.8 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 0.7 | 7.4 | **12.3** |
| Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma | 0.9 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.3 | 2 | **3.9** |
| Bachelor's degree or higher | 0.0 | 2.0 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 1.4 | **3.8** |
| University certificate or diploma below bachelor level | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.7 | **0.9** |
| **TOTAL** | **5.3** | **10.4** | **9.4** | **4.1** | **29.2** | **59.3** |

With the exception of supervisors in natural resources, agriculture and related production (median annual income: $80,000) and general trades (median annual income: $52,000), the median employment incomes for the remaining occupations are well below $40,000 per annum.

In contrast, the top two occupations with the highest non-Indigenous employment shares (100 percent) are:

1. Specialized middle management occupations in health care and central control and process
2. Operators and aircraft assembly assemblers and inspectors.

Further, eight of the top ten occupations for the non-Indigenous population have median annual incomes of well over $100,000.

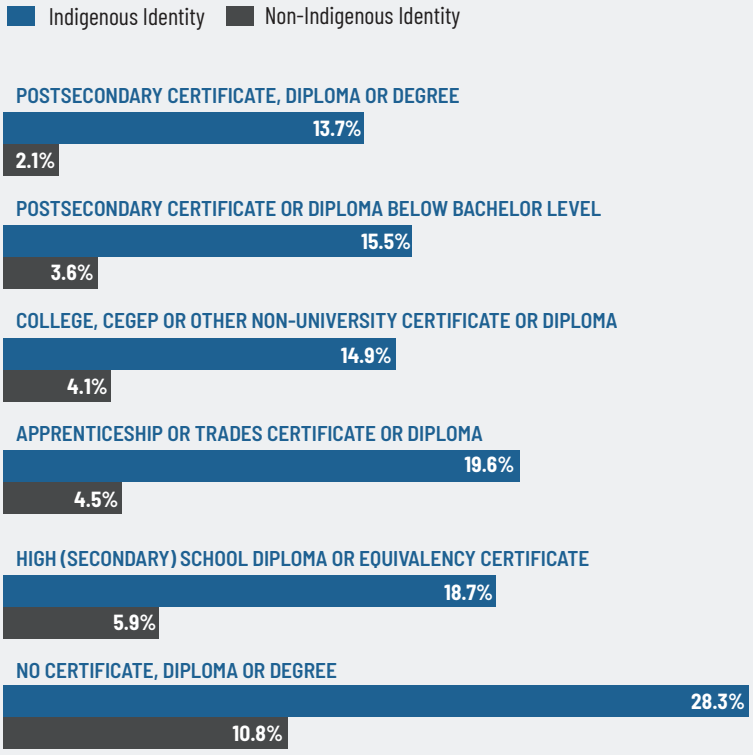
**The average wage difference between the top ten occupations with the highest non-Indigenous share and those with the highest Indigenous share in Nunavut is $96,810.**

The difference in economic opportunities significantly contributes to the wage inequality between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous populations and is also apparent when looking at employment by industry. The table below breaks down Indigenous employment shares by industry and highest educational attainment. Together, these five industries account for roughly 59 percent of Indigenous employment in Nunavut.

It shows that employees with no formal certificate, diploma, or degree account for the largest share in these industries and represent almost one-quarter of total employment. At 15.2 percent, the second highest overall share is employees with a high school diploma or equivalent, followed by those with a college or other non-university certificate or diploma, with a total share of 12.3 percent.

**FIGURE 13**

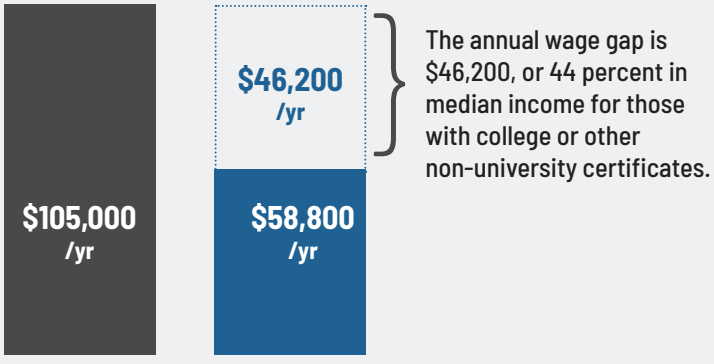
**Unemployment rate by educational attainment among the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population in Nunavut, 2021.**




SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, TABLE: 98-10-0451-01.

**FIGURE 14**

**The Annual Wage Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Workers with a College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma**




One could argue that lower formal educational attainment leads to fewer economic opportunities and a significant wage inequality between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous population in Nunavut.

Yet, this is only part of the socioeconomic picture. The figure to the left depicts unemployment rates for Nunavut's Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations by highest educational attainment. Differences in unemployment rates between these two groups should decline significantly with higher educational attainment – but they do not. For example, the unemployment rate among Indigenous people with a postsecondary degree is 13.7 percent. In comparison, it is only 2.1 percent among the non-Indigenous population. In fact, the average difference in unemployment rate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous among those with any degree is almost 14 percentage points, which suggests the existence of additional barriers or discrimination against the Indigenous population.

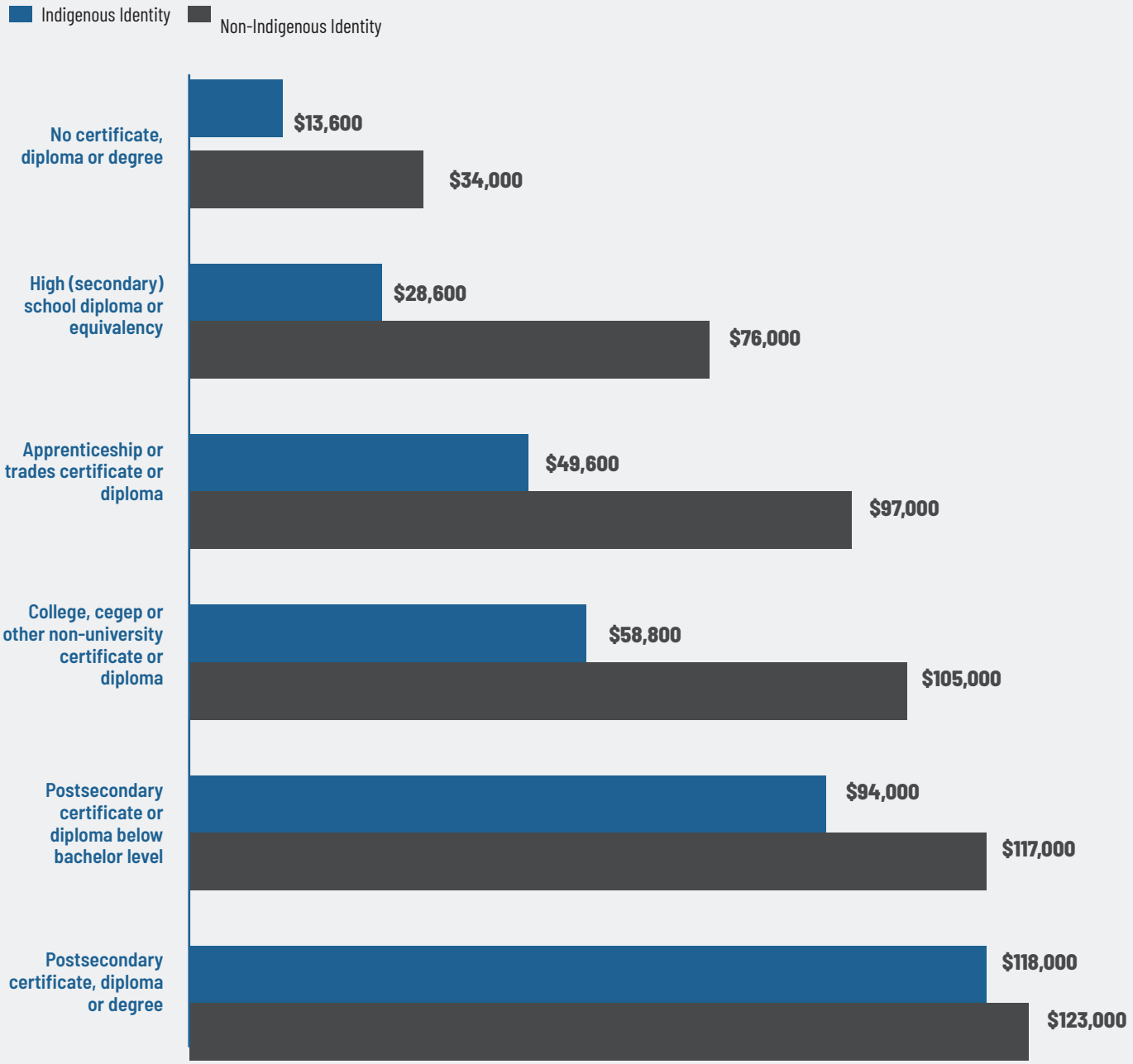
Another indicator of labour market discrimination is the wage differentials among Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers. The annual median employment income by identity and highest educational attainment illustrate that the wage gap exists for all levels of educational attainment.

The average wage gap is $31,567 per year, but it is significantly larger for specific groups. For example, the annual wage gap is $46,200 in median income for those with college or other non-university certificates.

The empirical evidence strongly suggests a severe lack of economic opportunities for the Indigenous population in Nunavut, resulting in disparate labour market outcomes, wage inequality, and a disregard for skills gained outside the formal education sector.

**FIGURE 15**

## Median Employment Income among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Workers at Various Levels of Educational Attainment



## SKILLS DEVELOPMENT & LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Despite the clear mandate of Article 23 of the Nunavut Agreement, which stipulates that Inuit should be represented in government employment in Nunavut according to their representation in Nunavut's population, a significant disparity persists. Currently, 83.74 percent of the Nunavut population is Inuit, but Inuit hold only 51 percent of filled jobs in the territorial and federal governments in Nunavut.

One argument for why Article 23 has not yet been fulfilled is a lack of relevant skills among the Indigenous population. In this context, as early as 2010, a report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut indicated that the inability to meet the obligations of Article 23 results from the failure to assess, plan, educate and train Inuit workers properly.[11]

Essential measures that should be taken to address these failures include:

- → Improving educational outcomes by revising the current educational system to better suit the needs of Indigenous students
- → Expanding skills training for the working-age population.

Regarding the first measure, the data suggests that creating an Inuktut-language education system would remove key barriers to successfully implementing Article 23. Indeed, Palesch (2016) and Wyatt (2021) emphasize that educational success and subsequent labour market outcomes would improve if Inuit were taught in their own language.

More broadly, evidence shows that student outcomes among Indigenous populations significantly improve when Indigenous students are taught in their language in primary school. Delprato (2021) finds that this approach renders the learning gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students insignificant. These promising results are supported by Angelo et al. (2022), who study the experiences and outcomes of Indigenous students' education in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada.

The importance of Indigenous language education has also been highlighted by de Varennes (2020), the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues. Urging governments to educate children in their mother tongue, the Special Rapporteur points out that this measure lowers drop-out rates, significantly improves academic results, improves levels of literacy and fluency in both the mother tongue and the official or majority language, leads to greater family and community involvement, and proves more cost-effective in the long-term. In addition, it can help mitigate the risks of *"ending up later in life with the lowest paying jobs and highest unemployment rates."*[12]

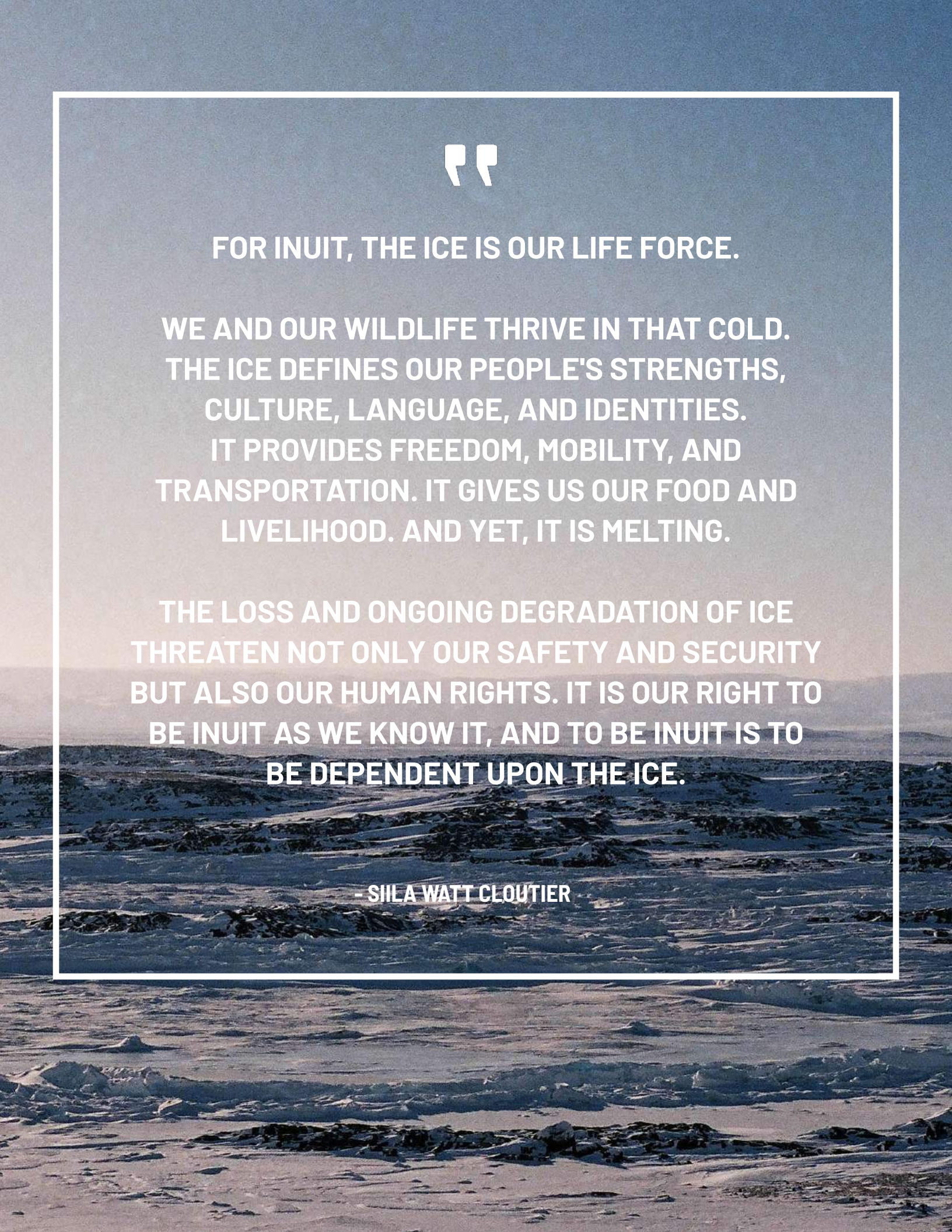
## CONCLUSION

This analysis finds that the economy in Nunavut is characterized by substantial government support for the mining industry at the expense of Inuit-led economic activities, giving rise to questions about the long-term socioeconomic benefits for Inuit. It further highlights the significant socioeconomic disparities between the benefits accrued from the mining sector and those from traditional Inuit economic activities such as hunting, arts, and crafts. It reveals that while mining is a major employer, its benefits to the local Inuit population are relatively modest compared to the traditional sectors.

**This empirical evidence supports calls for a re-evaluation of economic policies to better support Inuit-led economic initiatives.**

The analysis further utilizes economic multipliers to illustrate the broader impacts of different sectors on the regional economy. It shows that investments in traditional sectors, such as arts and crafts, yield higher job and income multipliers than the mining sector. This analysis highlights the potential for greater overall economic benefits from supporting traditional industries, reinforcing the need for a diversified economic strategy that includes substantial support for land-based activities.

Finally, the analysis makes an argument for integrating Inuktut-language education as a means to enhance educational attainment and labour market outcomes for Inuit. This recommendation is supported by extensive research showing that Indigenous language education significantly improves student well-being and academic performance.



FOR INUIT, THE ICE IS OUR LIFE FORCE.

WE AND OUR WILDLIFE THRIVE IN THAT COLD. THE ICE DEFINES OUR PEOPLE'S STRENGTHS, CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND IDENTITIES. IT PROVIDES FREEDOM, MOBILITY, AND TRANSPORTATION. IT GIVES US OUR FOOD AND LIVELIHOOD. AND YET, IT IS MELTING.

THE LOSS AND ONGOING DEGRADATION OF ICE THREATEN NOT ONLY OUR SAFETY AND SECURITY BUT ALSO OUR HUMAN RIGHTS. IT IS OUR RIGHT TO BE INUIT AS WE KNOW IT, AND TO BE INUIT IS TO BE DEPENDENT UPON THE ICE.

- SIILA WATT CLOUTIER

SIILA WATT CLOUTIER

# Transformation in the North: Reflections on the Return to a Holistic Economy

## Discussing where Inuit are today — with a focus on our economic activity — requires understanding where we have been over the past 100 years.

**IN THE 1920s,** we were forced to become fur trappers to meet the global markets. That is how we became entrenched in the needs of the world; that was the beginning of the shift in our way of life. Almost overnight, due to the arrival of traders, we changed our diets. Then came the global collapse of the fur market. We were left hanging out to dry as our governments all but forgot about us. Then, the American military arrived in our regions to build the airstrips. While they did not come to save us, they brought jobs and supplies and made life easier for us, and many of our Elders were very appreciative of that.

**IN THE 1970s,** the land claims were hailed as success stories, but they also relinquished a fair amount of our land rights. And, although we are so few, our community members are over-institutionalized in the child welfare and criminal justice systems, which causes rifts among those of us who remain.

**IN THE 1950s,** the schools were built, and we were brought into communities, which further changed how we lived. In the 1960s, the historical traumas started coming even faster: residential schools, forced relocations, dog slaughters, and seal bans. You know all of this. The abuses and the addictions that began in our communities were the result of the profound woundings we endured.

**IN THE 1980s,** toxins and persistent organic pollutants like DDT and PCBs began poisoning our food. Fast-forward to the 2000s: building on existing health data, the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) and Inuit Tapirisat Kanatami (ITK) launched negotiations for a UN treaty to make our country food safer.

**IN THE 1990s,** we started to realize that climate change is exacerbating the already very stressful situations in our communities: poverty, violence, suicide, and food insecurity.

> ... in a time lacking in truth and certainty and filled with anguish and despair, no woman should be shamefaced in attempting to give back to the world, through her work, a portion of its lost heart.
>
> – LOUISE BOGAN

**For Inuit, the ice is our life force.**

We and our wildlife thrive in that cold. The ice defines our people's strengths, culture, language, and identities. It provides freedom, mobility, and transportation. It gives us our food and livelihood. And yet, it is melting.

The loss and ongoing degradation of ice threaten not only our safety and security but also our human rights. It is our right to be Inuit as we know it, and to be Inuit is to be dependent upon the ice.

If we are to move toward equal partnerships, equal footing, and true reconciliation, the world must first understand our history.

## A "DEPENDENCY-LIBERATING" APPROACH

As social issues, health issues, and addictions took hold in our world, new forums, institutions, and infrastructure helped us organize ourselves. Social programs and services came into play, but they did not address the legacy of trauma. Instead, they became part of the problem, enabling many social issues to grow rather than be alleviated. We later realized that many of these programs only added to the dependencies colonialism had created.

We've got to start to address these problems from a human perspective. Success in any endeavour, economic or otherwise, is reliant upon the resourcefulness of its people. It has to be people-focused; it has to be on-the-ground-focused.

Colonization has trapped our people, stripped our freedoms, and minimized our skills. However, there is hope. By working towards dependency-liberating approaches within our communities, we can rebuild our people's skills and resourcefulness.

Land and culture are the solution to many of our problems. Culture is our medicine, and it's rooted in our home. All the skills that are taught traditionally are what we need. But it's more than becoming proficient providers and natural conservationists who work in traditional ways. It's about the character and life skills learned from our culture that we build along the way and share with others.

## CULTURAL SURVIVAL IN THE NORTH

We've been judged very harshly over the years by the animal rights movement when they see blood on the ice and become squeamish and aggressive towards our culture. But for us, blood on the ice means life. It's not confirmation of death; it's affirmation of life. And it's life giving life. It's the same as those in the South who are gardening, and their hands are in the dirt, and they're pulling out their carrots, lettuce, tomatoes, and so on. When our hands are in the blood, that's our harvest. That is our garden.

Our country food has an economic value. But it's the nutritional value that is so important to us. I often say it's not going to be Lipton Cup-A-Soup that's going to keep you warm out in more than minus 40 Celsius; it's going to be seal meat, it's going to be good food, country food.

The communal value of eating from the same animal is very powerful for us. There are ceremonies, rituals, and rites of passage — when the boys and the girls get their first animal or whatever the case may be. It builds their confidence and their self-worth. These are the people-building practices that we need to bring back to everything that we do, economic and otherwise.

At home in the Arctic, we're now facing an incredible growth of interest in developing the geological and ecological riches we have inherited. As Inuit, we place a

great value on the ice and snow because it is a real, stable platform that has allowed our people to hunt, train our children, and live our lives for untold millennia. There is no price that you could pay many of us for the loss of that ice. The whole world is now only learning to place a bigger value on the Arctic ice — and the cold as well — because we are learning more and more just how expensive it is to be losing the Earth's cooling system, the air conditioner for the entire planet. The ice of the Arctic is breaking down, and it's creating havoc all over the world: floods, fires, and hurricanes.

## AN ARGUMENT AGAINST THE "QUICK FIX"

The situation we face across the entire Arctic is evolving. Many companies are coming in to exploit the riches that are now becoming much more accessible beneath that melting permafrost and the sea ice. The hunger for jobs in our communities is real. Strangely, it becomes an appealing prospect to be digging up the land we have held so sacred for so long. Just a few years ago, we used to stand solidly together on high moral ground to defend our way of life. But with the lure of the quick fixes, it's become harder. There's some worry here: If we put all of our eggs into that basket of oil, gas, and resources while the rest of the world is trying to wean itself off its unsustainable activity, we'll be left in the dust again, cleaning up the mess — as we did with the DEW Line and with Resolution Island, and with the barrels that the Americans left.

**This is the test of our time: to do things differently. The people who depend on that ice and snow for cultural survival must be the central component of our plans. We cannot just permit the discussion of northern development to be conducted in terms of sovereignty, resources, and a narrow vision of economy. The focus must also be on human ways to empower our communities and join forces to form Inuit regions that are prosperous and sustainable.**

Unsustainable methods cause irreparable damage to the environment. It's forcing the planet to react with violent storms and other erratic weather. This is not unlike the inner child, the Indigenous child, or anyone who has gone through trauma. Without that care, a place to heal, and effective coping mechanisms, self-destructive behaviour is inevitable. What we see in our communities and our atmosphere is not abnormal behaviour at all; what we are seeing are perfectly normal reactions to extremely abnormal circumstances.

We have to reimagine and realign a new way forward with that conscious intention to make effective change on the ground. It will happen at the speed of empathy first. Then, the speed of trust will kick in once people understand that and respect us for the equality and equity deserving of Arctic peoples. We are not just victims of globalization. Nor do we want to be; we can be teachers of sustainability if given the opportunity.

I'm constantly in awe of our communities — that even through all the thick and thin of all we've gone through, we are still so connected to our culture and our ways. And that's going to be the solution.

## THE GLOBAL INUIT

The global pandemic was a grim reminder of how interrelated and interdependent we all are — we're certainly not set apart from the rest of the world. The pandemic broke open even more widely the unresolved issues of racism and social injustices in Indigenous communities as well as Black communities. And we cannot blame one country for the pandemic (or one virus, for that matter): it's really about what we have been doing to the habitats of all wildlife over many, many decades. So many countries have now been exposed for their outdated racist policies and approaches, which increases the risk to those who are already at risk of poor health conditions from poor health systems. But the pandemic also gave us time to pause, reflect, and try to do things differently.

Over the last 27 years, knowing that the world was very slow to address climate change as an urgent issue, I have often wondered what would happen to get the world to wake up to what we've been doing to our planet. In my wildest dreams, I never thought that it would be a virus that would bring everything to a halt. But it did.

Human trauma and climate trauma are one and the same, there is no doubt. Many of these viruses will be

driven by climate change, so why would we invest in systems that will only add and increase the CO2 in the air and create even more havoc for the Earth and its people?

We can innovate differently — not just in terms of businesses and our economies, but also in terms of how we can treat Indigenous issues differently and learn from how Indigenous peoples have taught and lived. We need to advocate for that value shift and economic shift within the Arctic's economic development and landscape. We have to reimagine and realign those values that are based on fairness and respect for our land, environment, planet, and each other.

One potential pathway is conservation economies. I have always believed that culture-match businesses with that protective conservation intent are forward-thinking. The deep-pocketed folks in the world today are moving in that direction of funding conservation economies. We should tap into those deep pockets to continue exploring conservation economies. What better way than the Inuit themselves (who are already natural conservationists) to be the guardians of land and ice? What better way to reclaim pride, dignity, resourcefulness, and wisdom that was taken away through these historical traumas and colonization? We do not want to be victims of globalization. We have much more to offer.

## ECONOMIC, SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

For decades, we have seen scientists come up in the spring and leave in the fall like our geese, and we rarely know what they have done and what their plans are. Is this research going to benefit us?

Gus Speth, an American environmental lawyer and scientist, said, "I used to think that the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, environmental collapse, and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science, we could address these problems, but I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy. And to deal with these, we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that."

We must seize this moment to make those effective changes. It starts with us.

**LEADERSHIP, TO ME, IS ABOUT NEVER LOSING SIGHT OF THE FACT THAT WHILE THE ISSUES AT HAND ARE SO MUCH BIGGER THAN INDIVIDUALS, INDIVIDUALS CAN WORK FROM A PRINCIPLED AND ETHICAL PLACE WITHIN THEMSELVES TO MODEL AUTHENTICALLY AND GENUINELY OFFER OTHERS A SENSE OF CALM, A SENSE OF CLARITY, AND A SENSE OF FOCUS...INDIVIDUALS CAN INSPIRE COMMUNITIES. AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES CAN SHAPE THE GLOBAL.**

In response, people ask me, "But what can I do?"

I tell them to look deeply inside themselves. Consider how you do things in your daily life, how you treat others, and how you treat Indigenous people. These changes will make a significant impact on the world around you. And if you change your world, it will change for us as Indigenous people. It's important to bring these issues down to the individual level — that, we have the power to change. And if we can change, others around us can change. It can be that simple.

Leadership, to me, is about never losing sight of the fact that while the issues at hand are so much bigger than individuals, individuals can work from a principled and ethical place within themselves to model authentically and genuinely offer others a sense of calm, a sense of clarity, and a sense of focus. Leadership is always about checking inwards to ensure one is leading from a position of strength and not fear or victimhood. Individuals can inspire communities. And local communities can shape the global.

# Endnotes

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