

How have Organizations attempted to Help the Inuit Sustain their Post-colonization Economy and have they been Effective?

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ABSTRACT

European colonization of the Inuit in Arctic Canada has left a long-lasting legacy in the economies of present-day Canadian first nation communities. The long-term sustainability of the Inuit economy is becoming an ever-present issue. This research explores the ways in which multiple organizations have helped the Inuit sustain their post-colonization economy and their effectiveness in doing so. It focuses on the case of the territory of Nunavut, which has been subject to various policies and efforts to ensure the sustainability of the economy in the long term.. Policy analysis was utilized to draw conclusions from Nunavut and Canadian government policy reports as well as reports that grassroots Inuit organizations have produced. The evidence in this research suggests that governments have been partially successful in creating a sustainable economy through providing employment opportunities and spearheading mining development for the Inuit, but that their policies often encroach upon Inuit traditional values and belief systems amidst their attempted efforts to mitigate those harms. Grassroots organizations, on the other hand, have created a positive and connected environment within the Inuit community by upholding Inuit traditional values, which has been effective in sustaining the Inuit post-colonization economy. Further research and action are necessary to glean further empirical data to measure the precise negative or positive impacts of the policies and initiatives that both the government and grassroots organizations have directed for the Inuit.

Introduction

Foreign powers encroached upon the lands of the Inuit and disrupted the harmony of the cultural traditions they had preserved for hundreds of years. Europeans first arrived in Inuit land of present-day Canada in the 1500s, and with each European visit to the Arctic lands, the Inuit regions became increasingly characterized as European territories (ITK, 2016). Decades of forced assimilation by the Canadian government then left an irrevocable mark on the Inuit culture and economy. It was only on April 1, 1999, that the Inuit started to regain their land claims and rights from the government of Canada (ITK, 2016). The economy of indigenous people in Nunavut, the most populated Inuit territory in Canada, was negatively affected. The long-lasting impact of colonization on the Inuit community stretches beyond the imaginable, with Nunavut's rates of suicide, food insecurity, alcoholism, and depression being the highest in Canada.

The majority of Nunavut people rely on the Canadian government to supply basic rations of food and public housing. Subsistence hunting has constituted a significant part of Inuit tradition and culture, with Inuit hunting bowhead whales, caribou and other marine animals for food and clothing (Jensen et al., 2018). However, the tradition of subsistence hunting is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain with the rise of climate change and changing government hunting regulations. The majority of Nunavut people therefore survive from meager food supply and are often unable to purchase goods to sustain their lifestyles because of extreme inflation in the region. A team from Global

News found that some items in a grocery store in Iqaluit, capital of Nunavut, were “sold for two or even three times the national average” (Semple, 2022).

Revitalizing the Nunavut economy serves as a rudimentary step in empowering future Inuit generations to preserve their rich indigenous culture. According to multiple studies, Inuit youth are showing less pride for their culture and heritage as conditions in Nunavut fail to radically improve. Nunavut people possess a prominent cultural identity, but their cultural presence is deteriorating due to the harsh conditions of living in the post-colonization era. The loss of the traditional economy and industries of the Inuit have powered the deterioration in Inuit cultural presence. “Pressures of centralization made it increasingly difficult for Inuit to practice subsistence based cultural practices with their families” (Maksimowski, 2014). Basic Inuit notions of wellbeing such as a having a spiritual relationship with land, being socially connected, and communicating openly within the village have decreased significantly with European colonization. Inuit children were coerced to attend residential schools which strained their relationship with their parents and community. This physical displacement and separation that the Canadian government have caused for Inuit families made it extremely challenging for traditional skills and knowledge to be passed onto the future generation, ultimately paving the way towards having an unsustainable economy, which relies on the wage economy.

A sustainable economy, as defined for this study, entails a functional economy that is able to utilize current resources to maximize financial output and increase quality of living steadily for generations to come. It also encompasses the ability for a group to achieve “long term economic growth without negatively impacting the economy or society” (Kamprad). An unsustainable economy means an economy with an increased vulnerability to crises (Ibid.)

The Canadian government has put forth some efforts to revitalize the Nunavut economy. The most prominent attempt was to provide workspaces for Nunavut Inuit to work in natural mineral mines (Murray, 2021). Although this has opened up more employment opportunities for Nunavut Inuit, it is a temporary solution for those who face financial instability. Moreover, some Inuit are vulnerable to spending their income on alcohol. Inuit who live closer to mines have been found to have higher consumption rates of alcohol “by 2 drinks per week” (Goffrey, 2017). Natural resources will also continue to be depleted in the future as global citizens venture out to extract resources from the Arctic, an increasingly valuable region rich of minerals and resources.

The wage economy consists of jobs paid with salary for work, and the majority of Inuit in Nunavut engage in the wage economy. Nunavut engagement in the wage economy however has been unsustainable as Nunavut civilians are unable to be employed in limited job positions due to a lack of education, weak infrastructure, and insufficient training (Arrigada et al., 2019). The majority of Inuit also engage in the wage economy due to growing pressures surrounding traditional ways of hunting or fishing propelled by ongoing climate erosion, climate change, and beyond (Ibid.) Furthermore, 30% of subjects of the study reported to be “discouraged searchers”, people who wish and are available to work but do not seek for employment as they believe no suitable work is available (Ibid.). A cultural disparity also exists with Inuit traditional values and the nature of the wage economy. The Inuit have been long dependent on each other to sustain their livelihoods and survive harsh cold winters, with one example being that Inuit hunters distribute their harvest with other families in the community for survival (Pass, 2016). However, people involved in the market economy “are seldom dependent on others as are the Inuit” (Ibid.). Thus, inherent cultural clashes also prohibit some Inuit to be employed in the wage economy. This shows not only the physical but internal struggles the working Inuit population have about the wage economy and employment. The economy is, therefore, currently unsustainable.

The Inuit economy is unsustainable for a number of factors. In order to understand how these challenges can be overcome, this research paper asks the question, “What are the ways in which organizations have tried to help the Inuit sustain their post-colonization economy and have they been effective?” It focuses on the case of the territory of Nunavut, which been subject to various policies and efforts to ensure the sustainability of the Inuit economy in the long term. Policy analysis was utilized to draw conclusions from Nunavut and Canadian government policy reports as well as reports that grassroots Inuit organizations have produced. The evidence in this research suggests that governments have been partially successful in creating a sustainable economy through providing employment opportunities and spearheading mining development for the Inuit, but that their policies often encroach upon Inuit traditional

values and belief systems amidst their attempted efforts to mitigate those harms. Grassroots organizations, on the other hand, have created a positive and connected environment within the Inuit community by upholding Inuit traditional values, which has been effective in sustaining the Inuit post-colonization economy.

Methods

To answer the research question “How can Inuit sustain their post-colonization economy?”, I have chosen to do a case study analysis. A case study analysis examines a research area in more depth by focusing on one place, phenomenon, person, etc. to extract information about the generalized trend of research results. Anthropologists cannot collect comprehensive data from a plethora of regions simultaneously to glean information that can support their central research hypothesis. Therefore, a case study is implemented to critically research one region to find meaningful connections and to then corroborate with other sources. Case analysis allows researchers to dive into the “morphology of a social structure” (Sykes). Delving into the social structure of the Inuit can result in meaningful findings for probing into the Inuit economy. I will use case study analysis of a place to answer my research question.

The subject of my case study analysis of a place is Nunavut. Nunavut is the largest territory in Canada inhabited by the Inuit. With Nunavut communities having different contributing factors towards their economies and elements of cultural tradition, Nunavut was the best region to target to discover how Inuit can sustain their post-colonization economies. Attaining diverse opinions on previous and current efforts to maintain the economy of the Inuit is valuable, as varied opinions of indigenous Canadian Inuit can provide insight into whether previous or current systems have been effective in sustaining the Inuit economy.

Additionally, Nunavut has the most amount of economic activity in territories inhabited by indigenous people. Nunavut is currently flourishing with the boom of mining activity (gold, uranium, etc.) which has contributed to providing employment and economic development opportunities. A vast array of potential evidence can be examined about economic sustainability and how the Nunavut economy has been negatively or positively impacted by colonization.

For indigenous communities that have been coping with the prolonged negative impacts of colonization, having a government of its own is particularly important in this matter. Having a representative government exhibits the stance that the wider Canadian government has taken to foster an independent and constructive environment within the Inuit. However, further examination is needed to measure the degree to which the Canadian government has elevated Inuit economy and way of life. A policy analysis “provides a way for understanding how and why governments enact certain policies, and their effects” (Browne et al., 2018). By examining both the positive and negative impacts of the regulations the Nunavut government has made by means of policy analysis, we can assess what regulations achieved or did not achieve its stated aim in improving the sustainability of the Inuit economy.

Ethnography in Nunavut could not be conducted in light of the rampant COVID 19 pandemic, allowing research only to be held online. Data was amassed through digital search and was collected in online databases such as Google Scholar and Jstor. Keywords such as “colonization”, “Inuit”, “Nunavut”, “mining” were applied to funnel my research to produce relevant and meaningful results. This study was conducted over the span of 3 months, undergoing extensive online research and analysis of sources. Different types of sources were examined, including primary sources such as interviews, documentaries, and statistics. Secondary sources such as opinions, newspapers, studies, and essays were further considered to analyze to what extent primary sources should be deemed to be useful. Secondary sources helped shape the development of my arguments and solutions to answer the research question of how organizations have tried to help the Inuit sustain their post-colonization economy and whether they have been effective. Primary and secondary sources were broken down into those about government, NGO, and grassroots organizations actions to sustain the Inuit economy.

Although secondary sources and primary sources were critically examined for its effectiveness and reliability, there are limitations to my method of study. Without conducting a full physical ethnography on a research area, one cannot glean the most comprehensive data. Since my observations are not directly taken from the lifestyles of Inuit

and are primarily based upon my research of secondary and primary sources online, my ideas may contain some areas of bias or inaccurate depictions of Inuit culture and lifestyles. Deviations from completely accurate observations of the Inuit are therefore inevitable, as I am not able to participate in living with the Inuit on a daily basis to extract concrete qualitative data and analysis. As a member of society outside of the Inuit realm and as a person who is not wholly immersed in Inuit culture, I am also subject to simplifying Inuit traditions without fully knowing what an activity or tradition entails. These limitations are significant to consider in the mind while reading this study.

Results and Discussion

The case study of Nunavut over the last 3 months produced some key findings concerning the current efforts undertaken by NGOs, grassroots organizations, and the Nunavut and Canadian government and their effectiveness. This section will analyze those findings. Although these specific results only pertain to the region of Nunavut, meaningful connections can be drawn for the greater community of the first nation peoples of Canada. The role organizations play in helping the Inuit sustain their post-colonization economy is crucial, as they serve as the mediators to enacting policies and regulations that directly benefit or harm the Inuit population. These organizations that are involved in bringing forth active change include NGOs and the government. A particular kind of organization which are essential yet easily ignored by the government are grassroots organizations. This research paper will further put the role grassroots organizations play in the movement to help Inuit sustain their post-colonization economy in scrutiny to address this research gap.

To determine on what grounds, we should deem an action by an organization "effective", we cannot only look at mere statistics to judge the effectiveness of a policy. Instead, a close analysis of qualitative data should be considered, with guiding criterion of how to evaluate whether an action has been effective or ineffective. The standards include: 1. How drastic the action increased quality of living for the Inuit, 2. How much the organization amassed financial advantages for the Inuit, and 3. If the organization carried out an action that can be sustainable in the long term. It is important to note that an economic solution that does not take into consideration traditional Inuit values should be deemed as faulty, as the Inuit economy cannot thrive without the upholding of Inuit cultural and traditional values. As seen in Gladun et al.'s research, even when Inuits choose to engage in more modern economic activity, traditional customs and traditions "continue to play a key role and influence decisions" (Gladun et al., 2021).

Government Action

The Canadian government has the most authority to radically change the livelihoods of the Inuit as the Canadian government has the most bodily autonomy as a governing entity, overseeing the affairs of the Nunavut government. Commendable decisions from the Canadian government include repealing Section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act which prevented Inuit from filing complaints about instances of discrimination to the Canadian Human Rights Commission in 2008. While the amendment to section 67 was passed in 2008, it was only until 2011 that First Nations people were able to have full equal access to Canadian Human Rights (Government of Canada, n.d.). Although no statistics or press releases were found to measure the precise impact this policy change had on the Inuit, it can be considered to have had a significant effect on the Inuit, as they were able to file complaints for discrimination not only experienced on a daily basis, but also for discrimination faced in their financial pursuits. It has also made the Inuit economy more sustainable, since theoretically, more Inuit businesses are set to thrive and prosper with less discrimination happening when they are making transaction, setting up their businesses, etc. In regard to standard 2 (whether an organization has contributed to financial advantages), current research does not allow us to consider the degree of how the Canadian government's action to amend Article 67 has led to economic advantages for the Inuit.

On a more local level, the Nunavut government has a more progressive approach to addressing problems related to the faltering economy of Nunavut. Their efforts to strengthen the Nunavut economy through supporting mining practices has constituted the majority of previous government interventions to help sustain Inuit post-colonization economy, by providing an opportunity for Inuit to participate in the wage economy. The Department of Economic Development and Transportation's Minerals and Petroleum division works actively with mining corporations to provide "financial and technical support for prospectors, the enhancement of investor relations, ... and workforce participants" (Nunavut Mining Symposium, n.d.). However, their efforts have not been effective as opposition from traditional Nunavut residents have delayed the construction of the Baffinland mine. As stated in the standards for assessing the effectiveness of an economic policy, because the Nunavut and Canadian government's efforts to actively spur mining development goes against the inherent spiritual and cultural values the Inuit hold, it is not sustainable in the long term. However, the Canadian Northern Economic Agency works with "indigenous peoples, communities, businesses, organizations, and other federal departments" in efforts to build a diversified and dynamic industry that works toward achieving sustainability (Nunavut Mining Symposium, n.d.). Organizations such as the Canadian Northern Economic Agency can help alleviate the discontent of Inuit who oppose mining practices, but more nuanced research is required to measure to what extent the Canadian Northern Economic Agency really considers indigenous opinions.

Jimi Onalik, the deputy minister of economic development in the government of Nunavut provided a critical outlook if the Baffinland mining project does not reach the next developmental phase. Onalik points out that the Baffinland Mining project is one of the only ways that the Inuit can radically increase their quality of living and the availability of country food to sustain their community lives (Murray, 2021). However, many Inuit oppose the notion of funneling capital towards building mines in Nunavut and believe the development of mines will lead to many inevitable repercussions. The National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health (NCCIH) is an organization established by the Canadian government aimed to improving the health and wellbeing of Canadian Inuit. The article from the NCCIH states, "Since the land is the foundation of Indigenous peoples' cultural traditions and spiritual beliefs, the environmental impacts of resource development can have devastating impacts to spiritual health" (Stokes, 2020). Mining is a type of natural resource extraction, which may thus have a negative impact on Inuit spiritual and emotional wellbeing. Mining can also change the pattern of caribou migrations in Nunavut. Caribou is one of the most common and prized factors in the Inuit diet. Inuit elders have frequently voiced their opinion on how mining influence on caribou will not only dwindle food supply but also spiritual health for the Inuit. The Nunavut government's partnership with mining companies to establish mines in Nunavut therefore, although promising, is not a sustainable solution to the dwindling Inuit economy, and does not meet standard 3 (sustainability in the long term).

Employment in mining also has numerous cultural repercussions for Nunavut Inuit. According to Maksimowski's interviews with Inuit natives in Nunavut, elders pointed out that mining disrupted caribou migration patterns and diet, which changed Inuit perceptions of their relationship with land (Maksimowski, 2014). Inuit in Nunavut usually congregate to pursue community activities to foster close-knit relationships. When workers at mines come back home after a strenuous day of labor in the mines, they may feel too exhausted to participate in community building activities, which decreases parental and community bonds that are vital for preserving Inuit culture and tradition. Elders also worry about the increasing ideals of consumerism which go against Inuit norms of sharing food and resources. A report filed by Agnico Eagle Mines before carrying out its mining projects in Nunavut writes, that the "potential effects on individual, family and community well-being are complex, far reaching and unpredictable" (Gregoire, 2014). Even the organizer of Nunavut's biggest mining companies concedes to the fact that mining can have negative repercussions for Inuit cultural and emotional wellbeing. Therefore, Inuit cultures and beliefs cannot be ignored when considering ways to bolster Nunavut's faltering economy.

Major efforts have been taken by the Nunavut government to counter the possible harmful effects that mining developments may have in Inuit community. In a publication published by four partners, including the Government of Nunavut and the Government of Canada, explicit guidelines were laid out to ensure that exploration of gas and oil is conducted in a sustainable manner. These conditions included how exploration companies should prove that their

development will have benefits for the Inuit community (employment, taxes, royalty), how companies conduct exploration by mitigating environmental catastrophes, and how Inuit communities should be given maximum opportunity to engage with companies on their exploration pursuits before businesses carry out their developments (Nunavut: Mineral Exploration, Mining, and Geoscience Overview, 2021). Whether natural resource exploration companies have been abiding by these principles remains a question that has to be addressed in detail by the Nunavut government. Therefore, although efforts have been made to bridge the opinions of the Inuit and mining corporations are fruitful, the Nunavut government's procedures to actively encourage mining development somewhat fails to adhere to Inuit traditional values which has a potential to wreak a pernicious effect on Inuit society.

Non-Governmental Organization Actions

Non-governmental organizations also frequently work in liaison with governmental bodies or grassroots organizations to provide new solutions or aid in terms of sustaining the post-colonization economy of the Inuit. NGOs have partnered with the Conference Board of Canada to create the "Nunavut Economic Development Strategy". Together, multiple NGOs, Inuit organizations, and the government have identified the main problems and possible solutions to create a sustainable economy for the Inuit and have explicitly taken into consideration the prominence culture plays in influencing any major decision to be made to help bolster the Inuit economy. Taking the same mining example to examine the effectiveness of this report filed by NGOs in alliance with the government, on page 21 of the report, the report commission states that their expectations for mining in Nunavut include having a functional "geoscience database to support exploration and investment decisions" (Nunavut Economic Development Strategy, n.d.). The Nunavut Geoscience project has been established online and has clear guidelines and information on the different mining resources and projects that have been taken into effect in Nunavut (Nunavut Geoscience Project, n.d.). This geoscience database is likely to be of great use for companies and industry experts to utilize this knowledge to fund different mines around Nunavut to fuel the economy. From the standpoint of the Nunavut and Canadian governments that work to push forward mining developments, the geoscience database serves as an effective tool for sustainable investment from foreign sources. However, the development of the Nunavut Geoscience database may be hypothesized to make access to Inuit territories easier for mining companies, who may exploit more natural resources in the long term. Although this is simply a possible negative scenario, it is one that is important to note. Even when NGOs are in the movement together with the government to increase the sustainability of the Inuit economy, standard 1 (increasing quality of lives for the Inuit) may not entirely be abided to as development of the Nunavut Geoscience Database may have a potential to further endanger some Inuit peoples' strong spiritual ties with the environment.

However, in the "Strategic Priorities: Our Community Economies" section, a wide array of action plans and possible solutions were formulated by the coalition of NGOs and grassroots organizations to reach towards building a sustainable economy for the Inuit. In Section 8, Small and Inuit Business Development, the report aims to continue to "work with financial institutions to investigate how risk capital can be secured using the current property system in Nunavut" and to "work with Nunavut's local businesses to help them win government contracts ... through full implementation of Article 24 of the NLCA" (Nunavut Economic Development Strategy, 2003). These action plans are extensive and specific, providing a clear sense of direction for what direction organizations have to take to achieve progress in making the Inuit economy sustainable. However, as of the status quo, there is no compilation of data or report on what the Canadian and Nunavut government have done in action for these plans.

Grassroots Organization Actions

Finally, Inuit grassroots organizations have a long-lasting impact in positively benefitting and bolstering the Inuit economy at a local level. Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada has multiple initiatives driven by the needs of often discriminated Inuit women to address their financial needs. The Inuit Women in Business Network has connected 141 Inuit women to share and connect their journeys of starting and owning a business. One beneficiary of this program

is soap business owner Bernice Clarke (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, n. d.). Clarke owns a successful Inuit traditional soap business that has won 2 awards named Uasau Soap. She uses bowhead whale blubber and sustainably sourced Inuit traditional natural materials to make her soap. The Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada organization has therefore not only fueled the connection between Inuit women to broaden the scope of their entrepreneurial journeys but also provided financial help for them to continue on with their product-building in the cultural industry (Pauktuutit Women of Canada, n.d.). According to the Government of Canada, “In 2015, the Inuit Arts Economy contributed 87.2 million dollars to Canadian GDP” which is equivalent to 2700 full time jobs in Canada (Government of Canada, 2021.). The cultural industry therefore plays a major part in constituting the Inuit economy and multiple grassroots organizations such as the Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada have contributed to foster these Inuit businesses.

Overall, my findings show that all three organizations have contributed to the sustainability of the Inuit economy to a certain extent. However, by applying the standards of sustainability and effectiveness to policies, actions, and plans, it can be observed that the actions of the government had the most easily observable impact in driving sustainability for the Inuit economy. However, efforts are often resented by the Inuit population who see them as a breach against their culture and tradition. My research suggests that the actions of grassroots organizations and non-governmental organizations have a more tangible impact on improving economic conditions of the Inuit, actions that focus on the whole person.

Conclusion

This study has aimed to determine the different policies and initiatives organizations have pursued in light of alleviating economic burden for the Inuit in the post colonization world. Most Inuit are still subject to discrimination, widespread poverty, and cultural deprivation. It is paramount that researchers take the initiative to assess previous efforts to sustain the Inuit economy and to improve policies and actions by identifying the aspects in which organizations have failed to reach. Organizations should subsequently devise and revise policies to better suit the Inuit needs that can help achieve sustainability of the Inuit economy in the long term. Greater communication and coalition between the Canadian government and grassroots organizations is encouraged to ensure economic policies are carried out with Inuit culture taken into consideration.

Through this research, it has been shown that government organizations such as the Canadian and Nunavut government have made partial progress to increasing sustainability for the Inuit economy. However, it is seen that these efforts are associated with resentment from the Inuit population as a breach against their culture and tradition. Ongoing government support for mining projects in the Nunavut region have increased the rate of employment, but nonetheless has harmed the lifestyles of many Inuit by posing risk to their diet and traditional customs. A perpetuation of distrust and negative sentiment towards the government is natural, as the Inuit are first nations people of Canada whose lives were colonized by Europeans who first immigrated to Canada. This underlying rift that the Inuit have with the Canadian government is one factor of why Inuit grassroots organizations have been more effective in their approaches to sustain the Inuit economy on a community level. Grassroots organizations have been found to have more tangible and positive impacts on the Inuit population, by providing more local and community-oriented support.

Empirical data to measure the extent of progress in making the Inuit economy sustainable is difficult to produce and scarce. It is necessary that researchers take the opportunity to further develop mechanisms in which they can measure the impact of government action or grassroots action in order to propel the movement further and ensure greater sustainability for the Inuit economy. Only when we can precisely measure the impact of policies and reforms, can we make improvements or adjustments to create even more promising policies. It is also significant that a great policy, whether it derive from the government or grassroots organizations, cannot exist without respecting and adhering to the traditions of the indigenous people.

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