EQUATOR INITIATIVE

UNDP

INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR COUNCIL (ICC)

Inuit territories of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Russia

EQUATOR PRIZE WINNER

Equator Initiative Case Studies

Indigenous and local sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities

UNDP EQUATOR INITIATIVE CASE STUDY SERIES

Indigenous Peoples and local communities across the world are advancing innovative sustainable development solutions that work for people and for nature. Few publications or case studies tell the full story of how such initiatives evolve, the breadth of their impacts, or how they change over time. Fewer still have undertaken to tell these stories with community practitioners themselves guiding the narrative. The Equator Initiative aims to fill that gap.

The **UNDP Equator Initiative**, supported by generous funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), awarded the Equator Prize in 2023 to 10 outstanding Indigenous communities and local communities from 10 countries. The winning organizations showcase innovative, nature-based solutions for tackling biodiversity loss and climate change. Selected from a pool of over 500 nominations from 108 countries, the winners were celebrated at a high-profile event, held virtually, on November 7th, in the lead up to the biodiversity and climate change negotiations at COP28. The event was part of the **Nature for Life Hub**, a three-day series of virtual events designed to raise ambition for nature-based solutions in global biodiversity and climate policy. The winners are sustainably protecting, restoring, and managing forests, farms, wetlands, marine ecosystems, and biodiversity to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, help communities adapt to climate change, and create a green new economy.

The following case study is one in a growing series that describes vetted and peer-reviewed best practices intended to inspire the policy dialogue needed to scale nature-based solutions essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is a non-governmental organization founded in 1977 that unites 180,000 Inuit across Inuit Nunaat, the Inuit homelands that span Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka in Russia. ICC recognizes that Inuit Knowledge and practices are critical to protecting the Arctic ecosystem and defending land and ocean rights. In 2016, ICC initiated the Pikialasorsuaq Commission to recommend an Inuit strategy for safeguarding and monitoring the health of the Pikialasorsuaq, a shared region between Canada and Greenland and the largest Arctic polynya. Through consultations with youth, Elders, men, and women in communities around the Pikialasorsuaq, this groundbreaking initiative leveraged Inuit Knowledge to produce recommendations to preserve the ecological integrity of Pikialasorsuaq, explore avenues for establishing an Inuit-led ecological management plan, and enable unrestricted movement between historically connected communities. The Pikialasorsuaq Commission marks the first international Inuit-led body to seek the development of an Inuit-led management area, setting a unique precedent for ecological management and Indigenous rights.

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KEY FACTS

Equator Prize winner

2023

Founded

1977

Location

Nuuk, Greenland

Beneficiaries

18 direct beneficiaries; 180,000 indirect Inuit beneficiaries across Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug of Russia

Thematic areas

Governance and capacity-building; Biodiversity conservation; Land rights and tenure security

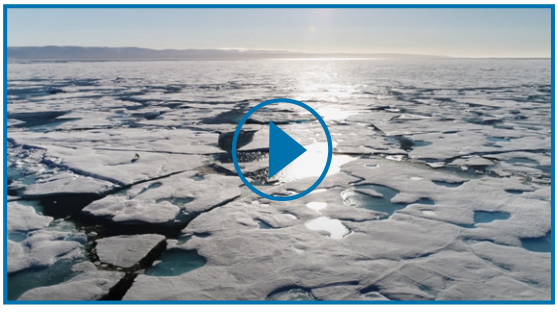
Fields of work

Policy, regulatory, or legal advocacy; Environmental education; Protected area management

Sustainable Development Goals addressed

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

EQUATOR PRIZE 2023 WINNER FILM



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

> ***Greenland and Canada share an Arctic treasure. We heard loud and clear from citizens in communities that are connected with Pikialasorsuaq that they want steps to be taken to protect it for future generations. People from the communities adjacent to Pikialasorsuaq want to be involved in the management and monitoring of this unique ecosystem. They recognize that the health of the species upon which they depend is connected to the health of the Pikialasorsuaq.***
>
> — Kuupik V. Kleist, Former Greenlandic Pikialasorsuaq Commissioner (2017)

Pikialasorsuaq, also called the North Water Polynya or "the Great Upwelling," is a unique and biologically rich marine area in the high Arctic of northern Baffin Bay, nestled between Greenland and Nunavut, Canada. Pikialasorsuaq is a polynya, a large, open area of nutrient-rich water in the middle of a thick, perennial ice pack. By remaining open, even in the winter, it serves as a feeding, mating, spawning, and over-wintering ground for many diverse species. Its unique properties make it the largest and most productive region in the high Arctic, crucial to species like narwhals, belugas, polar bears, and numerous seabirds and fish. This vital polynya overlaps with the 'Last Ice Area,' a term used to describe the region where year-round ice is expected to last, making it very important for species that depend on sea ice.

Living in connection with Pikialasorsuaq for nearly 4,500 years, Inuit communities have recognized and valued the area as a critical habitat and have amassed immense place-based Inuit Knowledge and practices critical to sustaining the vitality of the area's ecosystems. The ice bridge on Pikialasorsuaq's northern boundary facilitated historical migration, travel and connection between the Inuit of Canada and Greenland, developing spiritual and cultural bonds among Inuit communities on both sides. Today, around 5,000 Inuit reside in communities near the coastlines of the Pikialasorsuaq, in Greenland and Canada, depending directly on Pikialasorsuaq's resources, including narwhal, beluga, walrus, seals, polar bears, seabirds, and fish, like cod, halibut, and redfish. In Canada, these communities include Aujuittuq (Grise Fiord), Qausuittuq (Resolute Bay), Ikpiarjuk (Arctic Bay), Mittimatalik (Pond Inlet), and Kangiqtugaapik (Clyde River). On the Greenlandic side they include Siorapaluk, Qaanaaq, Savissivik, Kullorsuaq, Nuussuaq, Upernavik, and many more surrounding communities. The polynya's ecological importance extends beyond its immediate borders, indirectly supporting life in nearby deep waters, sustaining communities across Greenland and Canada, and supporting the health of our global climate.

Yet today, Pikialasorsuaq faces uncertainties from increased shipping activity, commercial fishing, tourism, oil and gas exploration, development, and climate change. Most alarming, the climate-induced melting in the northern ice bridge in Kane Basin, Nares Strait, and Ikeq (Smith Sound) threatens the survival of the polynya and the wildlife that thrive there. Climate change impacts are altering the landscape, including through glacial ice melt, unpredictable, late and thin winter ice formation, and permafrost thaw and erosion, and disrupted weather patterns. These changes directly affect Inuit communities dependent on the polynya and its resources. They also represent a significant global threat, as permafrost ice melt contributes to the release of significant amounts of greenhouse gases, perpetuating global climate change.

Pikialasorsuaq represents the interconnectedness of communities, marine protected areas, and proposed conservation initiatives across borders. As a region that was inhabited by Inuit both historically and into the present, the Pikialasorsuaq region's future as an Inuit-managed area stands to represent Inuit interests beyond its immediate shores. The journey towards Inuit-led management is

a local priority and a global imperative. It stands as a testament to the intricate relationship between Indigenous communities and the natural world, urging collective action to ensure the vitality of Pikialasorsuaq for generations to come.

Origin and structure

In response to the pressing need to safeguard Inuit hunting grounds and the Arctic environment and advocate for Inuit rights, Inuit leaders formed the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) in 1977. Since then, ICC has proactively advocated for Inuit rights and represented Inuit concerns in international forums including the United Nations and as a co-founder of the Arctic Council. In 2016, with collaboration from Inuit communities around the Pikialasorsuaq, ICC established the Pikialasorsuaq Commission. The Commission was formed to seek community and regional input, incorporate Inuit Knowledge and recommend strategies for safeguarding and monitoring the health of the Pikialasorsuaq for future generations. The commission set the first of many potentially powerful precedents for Indigenous leadership within Greenland and Canada and paved the way for the processes of establishing an Inuit Management Authority and Inuit-managed area.

ICC aims to protect the Arctic environment and promote Inuit rights globally, representing more than 180,000 Inuit of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka (Russia). The governance structure of ICC reflects a commitment to inclusivity and representation, with a quadrennial general assembly that brings together Inuit delegates from each nation. Together, the assembly created a declaration to guide the work of ICC over the next four years. Each national office is guided by a Board made up of delegates from its representative or member Inuit organizations. The ICC Executive Council has established gender equity, and currently, the Chair of the organization is an Inuk woman.

ICC funding sources include government support from Greenland and Denmark, as well as from private foundations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies, and other organizations. While securing long-term funding is an ongoing challenge, ICC has successfully maintained offices since its inception by focusing on securing funding for multi-year terms, such as chair terms lasting four years. The ICC Greenland office now has five full-time employees (all women), two contractors, and one intern.

Decision-making within ICC involves engaging key community leaders, Inuit government officials, member organizations from Canada, Greenland, Alaska, and Chukotka. The wealth of knowledge and expertise of Inuit hunters, fishers, and harvesters is central to the decision-making process. The leadership team, including the Chair, contributes to strategic decision-making by considering community input through the guidance of each national office's member boards.

LOCAL CHALLENGES FOR INUIT

"The Pikialasorsuaq is not just an ocean, or a unique wildlife area impacted by climate change. This is our home, our Nuna. This shared body of water defines who we are as a people – it connects us."

— Okalik Eegeesiak, Former International Chair, Inuit Circumpolar Council, and International Pikialasorsuaq Commissioner (2018)

Catastrophic climate warming

For centuries, Inuit communities have maintained their way of life through the sustainable use of Pikialasorsuaq. However, the imposition of national borders, laws, and unsustainable practices, compounded by climate change, pose severe threats. The Arctic, including Pikialasorsuaq, is warming three times faster than the global average, leading to immediate and dire consequences. Arctic communities now face perils such as thawing permafrost (a perennially frozen ground layer), disappearing sea ice, and shifting weather patterns.

The decline of Pikialasorsuaq due to climate warming and changing sea ice risks the habitat of many keystone Arctic species, including Arctic cod, seabirds, narwhals, belugas, walruses, and polar bears. These species are crucial for the hunting and fishing economies of Inuit communities and the overall balance and health of the polynya ecosystem. Rapid warming also puts Arctic residents' homes, villages, and ways of living at risk as permafrost thaws, causing the land to collapse and erosion to increase.

The rapid melting of the ice sheets, glaciers, and permafrost around Pikialasorsuaq and, more broadly, in the Arctic region contributes to global climate feedback loops, dangerously perpetuating and scaling climate change, with consequences ranging from increased greenhouse gas release, permafrost thaw, sea level rise, coastal erosion, wildfires, catastrophic weather patterns, and disruptions of fishing economies. Thawing permafrost and glacial ice, in particular, release vast amounts of ancient carbon, methane, and nitrous oxide, intensifying climate change globally and representing the world's most significant climate threat.

According to recent reports, scientists confirmed that the vulnerable polynya is at risk of ceasing to exist as a globally unique ice-bounded open-water ecosystem. The consequence of rapid warming in the Arctic is likely to be catastrophic. Yet, to address climate change in the region directly, increased collaboration across varying governance systems is needed. The interconnectedness of the Arctic's changes and the complex governance structures across the region present challenges to planning and implementing inclusive mitigation measures informed by Inuit Knowledge.

Complex land management systems

Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is formally supported by the Government of Greenland (an autonomous territory of the Kingdom of Denmark), both in funds and as a civil society organization. It is the only Indigenous Peoples' Organization within the Kingdom of Denmark. Some of the challenges for the work on Pikialasorsuaq are the complexities of legislative and governmental responsibilities regarding marine and environmental legal frameworks between Greenland and Denmark within the Kingdom of Denmark. For example, some areas of responsibility are under Greenlandic legislative and governmental authority, others are under Danish authority, and sometimes European Union regulation, and other areas are shared between Greenland and Denmark.

While Greenland is in the process of taking back responsibilities for its affairs from Denmark, some of the systems put in place during colonial times continue to persist, as historically, Denmark has retained authority for managing natural resources even under Greenlandic self-governance. This complex relationship must be navigated in any work on cross-border conservation management. In the midst of this complexity, the Greenlandic government currently lacks robust protected area legislation beyond national parks or UNESCO designation and does not have a precedent for protected area legislation explicitly informed by Inuit values. While the National Hunters and Fishers Association of Greenland (Kalaallit Nunaanni Aalisartut Piniartullu Kattuaffiat or KNAPK by its acronym in Greenlandic) operates as a civil society organization to represent hunters' and fishers' interests, and often promotes Inuit Knowledge and Inuit hunting and fishing practices, management of natural resources and areas guided by the government and informed by the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources does not formally recognize or take into account Inuit Knowledge.

The Pikialasorsuaq initiative has encouraged further collaboration between Greenland and Denmark to establish an approach to cross-border conservation and management and is advocating for the rights of Inuit as natural resource managers.

Challenges in land rights and tenure

Greenland is a unique country that does not recognize individual land rights. According to tradition, Greenland has no private ownership of land. All people have access to land, and individuals may lease land from the government for housing and business ventures. Land management decisions and allocation of rights for the use of land are made at the municipality level but must be in line with national planning. This approach to land rights aligns with Inuit values. However, the model can present challenges. Advancing Inuit-led management and incorporating Inuit Knowledge depends on cooperation with the Government of Greenland, among other stakeholders. Amid this complexity of land tenure, Indigenous rights and respect for the Indigenous management systems must be prioritized so as not to be lost.

While there is a proven conservation value of Indigenous land and marine management systems, the most important priority is to uphold the fundamental rights of Indigenous Peoples to have authority on the lands and seas of their traditional territories. In the Canadian context, upholding and respecting the right of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination, including the right to be the primary decision-makers in their homelands represents a major act of reconciliation.

LOCAL RESPONSES BY INUIT

"We are extremely honored that the joint work of Inuit from Greenland and Canada is highlighted and recognized by the United Nations. Inuit Circumpolar Council initiated the Pikialasorsuaq project with the purpose of establishing Inuit-led management of the important polynya. The Pikialasorsuaq polynya is situated between Greenland and Canada, and ICC continues to push for establishing an Inuit-led management regime transcending nation-state borders. We call on our governments to support the Inuit-led efforts to jointly safeguard this rich area with great biological productivity and economic and cultural importance for Inuit."

— Sara Olsvig, International Chair, Inuit Circumpolar Council (2023)

Establishing the Pikialasorsuaq Commission and laying the framework for an Inuit Management Authority

In 2016, in anticipation of engaging in multilateral collaborations to protect Pikialasorsuaq, Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) established the Pikialasorsuaq Commission to gather information critical to its mission. Three Inuit Commissioners were selected from Greenland and Canada as well as non-governmental organizations like the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Canada, Oceans North, and the Hunters and Fishers Association of Greenland (Kalaallit Nunaanni Aalisartut Piniartullu Kattuaffiat or KNAPK by its acronym in Greenlandic) to collaborate with ICC and conduct consultations with Inuit community members closely tied to Pikialasorsuaq. The consultations established a baseline of concerns and desired next steps for the region. Guided by the Inuit Knowledge gathered during consultations, the commission formulated a report with three main recommendations:

1. To establish an Inuit Management Authority (IMA) and regime led by Inuit representatives from communities in the Pikialasorsuaq region, including a framework for regulating activities like transportation, shipping, and offshore industrial development, and ensure the monitoring and conservation of living resources within and adjacent to the Pikialasorsuaq and the related health of communities that depend on these resources.
2. To identify a protected area comprised of the polynya itself and including a larger management zone that reflects the connection between communities, their natural resources, and the polynya, formed by Inuit in agreement with all parties, formally recognized by governments, and monitored and managed by Inuit to support the Inuit vision of a working seascape.

3. To establish a free travel zone for Inuit across the Pikialasorsuaq region.

A final report was published by the Pikialasorsuaq Commission in November 2017 titled 'People of the Ice Bridge: The Future of the Pikialasorsuaq.' In the years following, ICC engaged with authorities in Greenland and Canada to garner support for the Commission's recommendation to establish an Inuit Management Authority (IMA). This advocacy and engagement led to the signing of a Letter of Intent (LOI) on October 19, 2023, by the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard of Canada and the Minister of Agriculture, Self-Sufficiency, Energy and Environment of Greenland for Cooperation on Pikialasorsuaq, an essential step towards the collaboration of Canada and Greenland regarding Pikialasorsuaq and Inuit communities. The LOI acknowledged intentions for the establishment of a joint Pikialasorsuaq steering committee across Canada and Greenland, with representation from Inuit and national governments on both sides.

In 2024, ICC convened the first Meeting of the Parties, bringing together the political-level rights holders and stakeholders on the Pikialasorsuaq process to discuss what an IMA might look like. Establishing the IMA would require creative thought on new policies and laws that support the creation of a first-ever transnational Inuit-led authoritative body to direct ongoing and future work in the Pikialasorsuaq area. ICC aims to see an IMA established that will comprise Inuit hunters, fishers, harvesters, and knowledge holders from the Pikialasorsuaq region, ensuring the involvement of Inuit in decision-making and management related to the stewardship and conservation of Pikialasorsuaq. The IMA will uphold Inuit rights, Inuit Knowledge, and Inuit practices, allowing Inuit to continue hunting and fishing livelihoods while safeguarding biodiversity. It could also make waves beyond the region, becoming a case study for Indigenous-led conservation. By setting a precedent for recognizing the rights of Indigenous Peoples, it will champion community-based, Indigenous-driven conservation strategies in collaborative transnational and multilateral contexts.

KEY IMPACTS

Establishing the Pikialasorsuaq Commission and laying the framework for an Inuit Management Authority

- The Pikialasorsuaq Commission was established in 2016.
- The Commission published its final report in November 2017.
- The Governments of Canada and Greenland signed a Letter of Intent in 2023.
- The first Pikialsorsuaq Meeting of the Parties took place in 2024, further advancing work to establish an Inuit-led management approach for Pikialasorsuaq.

"The Pikialasorsuaq Commission process has been developed from the bottom up and it is clear that Inuit of the Pikialasorsuaq want to lead the management of this area."

— Okalik Eegeesiak, Former International Chair, Inuit Circumpolar Council, and International Pikialasorsuaq Commissioner (2017)

Proposing an Inuit-led management area

Recognizing the critical need to preserve Pikialasorsuaq, the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is actively working towards establishing a bi-national Inuit-led management area, including the polynya and its surrounding areas. This initiative would protect Inuit hunting and fishing rights and general ways of life through legislation and subsequent management plans. Ongoing dialogue with involved parties and technical experts underscores ICC's commitment to centralizing Inuit perspectives in management, protection, and conservation efforts.

The proposed management area would safeguard approximately 8,500,000 hectares of open water polynya—an area equivalent to the size of Austria. Establishing Pikialasorsuaq as a management area would support Inuit rights of use and access. This monumental effort upholds the rights outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), recognizing the rights of Inuit to make management decisions regarding their homelands.

Protecting Pikialasorsuaq would also defend the decline of multiple species classified as vulnerable by the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN), like polar bears *(Ursus maritimus)*, walrus *(Odobenus rosmarus)*, Atlantic puffin *(Fratercula arctica)*, Atlantic cod *(Gadus morhua)*, haddock *(Melanogrammus aeglefinus)*, and other marine and avian species. While not classified as vulnerable, narwhals, belugas, and seals whose habitats are increasingly threatened would also benefit from additional protection. Inuit hunting and fishing practices, characterized by conservation through sustainable use, would play a crucial role in supporting the sustainability and longevity of these species.

The collaborative effort could also reunify the Inuit communities surrounding polynya. Both sides of the polynya have historically been significant for cross-border cultural exchange and travel amongst Inuit. However, since 9/11 caused a tightening of international borders, travel across the polynya has become challenging. Therefore, one of the goals of the ICC, responding to the recommendations of the Pikialasorsuaq Commision is facilitating visa-free cross-border travel for Inuit of the region.

Pikialasorsuaq stands as a beacon of Arctic biodiversity and Inuit rights, and its preservation is not only a regional concern but a global imperative. ICC's advocacy for an Inuit-led protected area exemplifies the ongoing need to harmonize ecological conservation with human communities, fostering a sustainable planet for both people and wildlife.

KEY IMPACTS

Proposing an Inuit-led management area

- The Pikialasorsuaq Commission proposed a protected area for 8,500,000 hectares of high Arctic open water.
- Protecting Pikialasorsuaq would defend the decline of multiple species classified as vulnerable by the International Union of Conservation of Nature.
- The collaborative effort could reunify the Inuit communities surrounding polynya.

Collecting and sharing Inuit Knowledge

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) is actively engaged in a long-term project entitled "Pikialasorsuaq - Inuit Knowledge of Marine Ecology in Northwest Greenland." This Inuit Knowledge project focuses on gathering and elevating Inuit Knowledge, particularly place-based knowledge critical to the Pikialasorsuaq area. After completion of the project, the knowledge gathered will be shared in aggregate form, contributing to marine conservation planning and the founding of regulatory processes associated with establishing protected areas in the Arctic region.

The Inuit Knowledge project highlights the crucial role of the Arctic Ocean, the Last Ice Area, and the Pikialasorsuaq polynya in Inuit health, and well-being. It also enhances the role of Inuit Knowledge in fisheries and food security, urging governments to fulfil their obligations in engaging Inuit perspectives, which can benefit sustainable development.

Within the project's scope, ICC facilitates Inuit-led and co-designed workshops, on Inuit Knowledge to demonstrate how it can be a critical source of information for biodiversity research, management, and policy for marine areas. These workshops serve as a platform for knowledge holders and community members to contribute valuable insights related to marine ecology in Pikialasorsuaq and for that knowledge to be recorded and catalogued. Workshops also help to perpetuate knowledge sharing across generations and provide empowering spaces for Inuit to recall the essential role of their living Knowledge and Traditions in upholding stewardship of nature. As of March 2025, ICC held five workshops for 39 hunters and fishers across five communities around Pikialasorsuaq. It also conducted 13 interviews with hunters and fishers to gather and Inuit Knowledge about the region.

ICC's efforts in gathering and sharing Inuit Knowledge represent a crucial step toward elevating Indigenous perspectives in marine conservation initiatives. The project is still ongoing, with plans to engage more community members across a few more communities. By actively involving communities in the Pikialasorsuaq project and providing a platform for their Inuit Knowledge, ICC contributes to informed decision-making, biodiversity research, and sustainable practices in the Arctic region. The project's future impact on marine conservation planning underscores the importance of valuing and centering Inuit voices in shaping policies and actions related to Inuit homelands.

KEY IMPACTS

Collecting and sharing Inuit Knowledge

- To date, ICC has conducted five workshops in five communities around Pikialasorsuaq.
- To date, ICC has engaged 39 hunters and fishers in workshops.
- To date, ICC has conducted 13 interviews with hunters and fishers.

Advocating for gender equality

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) recognizes the importance of addressing gender-related issues within its work, striving to ensure gender equity and inclusivity across its initiatives. The organization actively promotes gender equality and women's empowerment and addresses specific challenges faced by Inuit women.

As a Greenlandic organization, the Inuit Circumpolar Council Greenland adheres to Greenlandic and Danish standards of gender inclusion and empowerment in selecting employment candidates and employment contracts and within all leadership committees and decision-making bodies. Efforts are made to ensure women are in integral roles, contributing to the organization's policies and strategies. ICC currently employs five full time employees, all of whom are women. The Pikialasorsuaq Commission also includes two women commissioners amongst its team of three to support a balance of gender perspectives.

ICC advocates for protecting and promoting women's rights and advocates for the elimination of gender-based violence, acknowledging the unique challenges faced by Inuit women. For example, ICC advocates for missing and murdered Indigenous women, asserting the need for continued attention and action to address this critical issue. ICC also stands against the systematic, forced sterilization of Greenlandic women over the past decades and contributed input to the terms of reference for the Government of Greenland's investigation into these human rights violations.

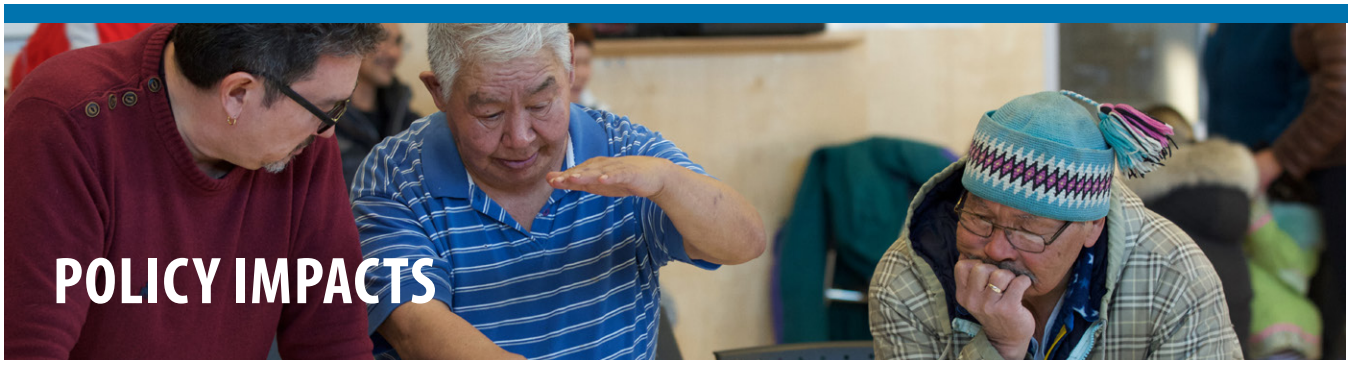
The organization also addresses health disparities including through its Circumpolar Inuit Health Committee, by advocating for accessible healthcare services, addressing health challenges specific to women, and promoting mental health support. ICC will convene an Inuit Women's Summit in 2025, which will continue to advance work and advocacy in these areas.

ICC engages in advocacy efforts to influence policy changes that promote gender equity at regional, national, and international levels. This work includes participating in forums, conferences, and discussions to raise awareness about the importance of gender equality in the Arctic context. By addressing gender-related issues, ICC aims to create more inclusive and equitable societies within Inuit communities, acknowledging women's vital contributions to the well-being and resilience of Arctic culture and society.

KEY IMPACTS

Advocating for gender equality

- ICC is gender inclusive and accessible with five women working full-time on the team.
- The Pikialasorsuaq Commission included two women commissioners amongst its team of three to support a balance of gender perspectives.
- ICC advocates for the rights and promotion of Inuit women.



POLICY IMPACTS

National policy impacts

The Inuit Circumpolar Council's (ICC) work influences local, regional, and national policy in Inuit homelands within Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka. For example, ICC supported the Government of Greenland signing a Letter of Intent (LOI) with the Government of Canada regarding Pikialasorsuaq, its future conservation and the first-ever cross-border Inuit-led management plan. ICC also supports the work of the Qikiqtani Inuit Association on the Canadian side to establish several new marine protected areas (MPAs), two of which will sit immediately adjacent to Pikialasorsuaq and, once designated, will be part of a more extensive network of MPAs in Canada and the Arctic more broadly. Further connecting Inuit homelands, the organization advocates for the Governments of Greenland and Canada to plan and implement visa-free travel for Inuit across Pikialasorsuaq between Canada and Greenland.

ICC also works with leaders of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on collective norms and actions in sustainable development for Inuit across their homelands. This work is leading to important policy changes representing Inuit rights amidst a history of colonial legacies, including racial discrimination, ethnic discrimination, and issues of national origin for Inuit across Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka.

Contributions to the global agenda

At the global level, ICC supports the implementation of several critical multilateral agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).

For example, Pikialasorsuaq has become a leading case study on engaging with Indigenous Knowledge in conservation and upholding the rights of Indigenous Peoples in stewardship and management of lands and waters amongst working groups of the UNFCCC, CBD, International Maritime Organization (IMO), the United Nations Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction treaty (BBNJ) and the Arctic Council. Across these channels, ICC and its projects like Pikialasorsuaq support the reduction of inequality (SDG 10), the development of sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), the improvement of responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), and the attainment of climate and marine health (SDG 13 and SDG 14). ICC also contributes to gender equality (SDG 5) through its policies on the inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making.

REPLICATION, SCALABILITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY

Replication

The Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) highlights its ongoing work across Inuit homelands, helping advance the uptake and support of its work. These communications uphold the possibility and importance of Inuit pursuing the development of similar marine protected areas and conservation efforts that respect Inuit hunting and fishing practices. As many Inuit depend upon the marine ecosystem, Inuit management areas provide an effective governance structure to protect and support Inuit livelihoods. Although the Pikialasorsuaq project has yet to be completed and replicated, ICC hopes that it will be a model and source of inspiration for Inuit-led protection of the remaining coastal seas of Canada and Alaska.

Scalability

ICC and the Pikialasorsuaq Commission have made significant progress in establishing durable partnerships across diverse levels of government on the Canadian side. Outreach initiatives are in progress, targeting the Governments of Greenland and Denmark, as well as engagement with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and commercial partners. This multi-pronged approach recognizes the importance of collaboration across various stakeholders to achieve broader impact and sustainability.

ICC's vision for scaling growth involves supporting a broad mosaic of Indigenous protected and conserved areas consistent with Inuit rights. This approach aligns with the project objectives, aiming to extend its impact across Inuit Nunaat, encompassing both Greenland and Canada.

Sustainability

ICC's longstanding commitment to Inuit rights since 1977 demonstrates its enduring dedication to the issues faced by Inuit people and its ability to sustain its efforts over the long term. The organization has received consistent funding, including support from the Government of Greenland. While the ICC office in Greenland actively seeks additional funding from various sources, the relatively stable base funding the organization has procured over its tenure has helped it uphold ongoing operations and grow its initiatives. This combination of consistent funding and its active search for additional funding to expand demonstrates a proactive and reliable funding approach.

ICC also recognizes that sustained change requires involvement and capacity-building at various levels of community and governance structures. ICC invests in Inuit leadership by involving community members, including youth, in the organization's human rights, biodiversity, and climate change work and empowering Inuit in conservation leadership, management, and policy. This strong community involvement will help ICC continue to carry their mission into the future.

FUTURE PLANS

ICC will continue to work to implement the Letter of Intent (LOI) signed between the Governments of Canada and Greenland and on implementing all the recommendations of the Pikialasorsuaq Commission. From 2024 through 2028, ICC has outlined a series of impactful milestones, including organizing Pikialasorsuaq Meetings of the Parties, making a decision on the Inuit Management Authority Structure, and deciding on a Bilateral Pikialasorsuaq Designation. A critical step in this process involves establishing the Inuit Management Authority. Subsequently, the focus will shift to creating a comprehensive Pikialasorsuaq Management Plan to ensure this significant area is sustainably managed while upholding hunting and fishing rights and access for Inuit.

PARTNERS

- ***Aage V. Jensen's Foundations:*** Provides programme support through funding.
- ***Government of Canada, Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans:*** Provides support in negotiation of Pikialasorsuaq.
- ***Government of Canada, Ministry of Global Affairs:*** Provides support in negotiation of Pikialasorsuaq.
- ***Government of Greenland, Ministry of Agriculture, Self-Sufficiency, Energy, and Environment:*** Provides support in negotiation of Pikialasorsuaq.
- ***Government of Denmark, Ministry of Foreign Affairs:*** Provides programme support through funding.
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