

## An Inuit way of looking at the Arctic development: The Inuit Conservation Economy

Monica Ell-Kanayuk  
President, Inuit Circumpolar Council – Canada  
Presentation at Arctic Development Expo  
Indigenous Leadership and Circumpolar Governance  
15 June 2021

Thank you for inviting me speak on this panel - An Indigenous Vision for the Arctic. I am Monica Ell-Kanayuk and I am the President of the Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada. I am a businesswoman, a mother, a grandmother, a seamstress. Understanding that the objective of this forum we are attending today is to “strive to make knowledgeable decisions to enhance circumpolar life and create innovative solutions for our northern realities,” my talk today will focus on Inuit innovation and an Inuit way of looking at the economy and at conservation - sometimes you need to look back to see the future.

Although we are virtual at these meetings - I am surrounded by a wealth of knowledge, and you have already heard from Sheila and Dalee - past and present voices from the Inuit Circumpolar Council. I am immensely proud to be amongst these giants in Arctic leadership and Governance. Every four years Inuit from all four countries gather at the ICC General Assemblies – as much as this is a time to talk policy and priorities it is also a time that reminds us, we are one peoples divided by four countries. It is a time to celebrate our unity and our rich culture. The 2018 theme of the General Assembly in Utqiagvik was *Inuit: The Arctic We Want*.

This is important because there have been and continue to be many interests from within Canada, the circumpolar world and from those who call their states ...the “near” Arctic. Foreign investments in the Arctic, whether for infrastructure, resources development, or Arctic research - contribute to Inuit communities – some jobs, some research projects -- but at what cost? Do these investments give investors legitimacy for decision making in the Arctic? I would have to say yes, and if yes, is this in the best interest of Inuit? I framed that not as a statement but rather a question. These foreign actors all have vested interest in the Arctic – its resources, shipping routes, and even the environmental services that the Arctic provides the planet. The Arctic has been called the ‘canary in the coal mine’. Sheila Watt-Cloutier framed the Arctic as the ‘barometer of the planet’ – save the Arctic save the planet – she is right.

Inuit and Indigenous peoples worldwide - in particular, those with a direct, profound and spiritual relationship with oceans, coastal seas and the marine environment - have inherent rights to these territories and resources as affirmed in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, ILO Convention 169, and the 2016 American Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other international human rights instruments. It is crucial to recognize and respect the right of Inuit to directly participate in processes that affect them and this

should be considered in the dialogue on economic development. These rights ensure Inuit are not stakeholders but rather, RIGHTS holders. Dalee Sambo-Dorough, an early architect of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, made certain Indigenous peoples RIGHTS were appropriately articulated and supported by international law.

There is also a great deal of discussion about a Blue Economy. Countries around the world are developing Blue Economy “strategies” - as is Canada. When I think of the Arctic and the Blue Economy – I need to consider several factors. Is a Blue Economy strategy a way to “economizing the ocean” and if so, for who’s benefit - is this in the best interest of Inuit? That would seem to mean increased fishing, shipping, tourism? Would economic value continue to flow south and east? The Blue Economy means many different things to different states. Canada, I believe, understands that the Blue Economy is not just about economic pursuits, it is also about conservation of the marine regions.

As such I’d like to focus my time with you on a discussion about a Inuit led Arctic conservation economy. What does this look like? Mean? I’ll give you a few examples from my region of Nunavut to explain and one that encompasses the Central Arctic Ocean.

I would like to share a concept - the conservation economy – that Canadian Inuit have practiced in the past and are re-building for our future – it is a vision advocated for internationally by ICC. The material in this presentation formed the basis for ICC’s contribution to the Arctic Council’s Sustainable Development Working Group, *Economy of the North 4 (ECONOR IV)*. This report was released at the Reykjavik Ministerial meeting last month and can be found on the SDWG’s website.

Inuit have always used what was available. Inuit innovation has allowed us to carve out our rich culture from the beautiful Arctic tundra, coast, ocean, and ice required skill. We believe the 21<sup>st</sup> Century requires a broader economic development vision than the one employed since the whalers first came to take the resources and revenue south – out of the Arctic, from our communities. To be transformative a new Arctic economy must be well-adapted for the people it serves – those Arctic peoples with rights. A vision of a sustainable Arctic economy must ensure benefits stay in the Arctic and do not flow south at the expense of the people and the environment.

As stated in the Inuit Circumpolar Council’s (ICC) 2018 Utqiagvik Declaration, “...economic development and social and cultural development must go hand-in-hand, resulting in self-sufficiency, which is an essential part of greater political self-determination.”

Inuit and other Arctic Indigenous peoples have experienced numerous failed attempts to impose economic development which disregards social and cultural circumstances. To be truly sustainable, development must be in accord with the realities of life in Inuit Nunaat and support Inuit rights to self-determination in governing our land, our resources and ourselves.

In the Canadian Arctic Inuit are exploring a “conservation economy” based on the establishment of marine protected and conserved areas negotiated with the federal government. The Impact Benefits Agreement between Inuit and the government cover management planning, rights to resources, Inuit stewardship, research and monitoring, career

and training opportunities and economic opportunities for Inuit, among other things. Inuit have been creating new paradigms for marine conservation or better said by using our Inuit knowledge and practices - other effective Inuit conservation measures (OEICM) – approaches that are Inuit led and build on our culture and economy. We are creating conservation economies through marine protection and conservation. The Pikialasorsuaq Commission recommendations in 2017 had a vision of this Inuit led management of a region shared by Canada and Greenland. In Canada, this region is called Sarvarjuaq. This vision for marine conservation is not new it builds on how Inuit have always approached marine conservation – through a holistic ecosystem-based approach to marine management. Inuit are a marine people – our economy, our food security and our Inuit culture are dependent on the marine environment and not divisible. I'll speak a little more about these later in my talk.

In its early stages, this Inuit vision of a conservation economy is centered on development that supports communities by providing sustainable jobs based on partnerships that recognize that Inuit continue to be the best stewards of our land and waters.

These Inuit models are based upon the Indigenous Knowledge and the lived experience of generations of Inuit, adapted for the cultural context of northern Inuit communities. In addition, by leveraging Inuit expertise and Inuit Quajimajatuqangit (Inuit Knowledge), this type of partnership empowers Inuit to exercise self-determination by managing our own communities and environment. Finally, an Inuit conservation economy is guided by Inuit-led research which in turn is based on the co-production of knowledge.

Conservation is not usually considered a form of economic development. In fact, conservation and economic development are often thought of as opposing realities.

However, Inuit see things differently. Inuit are a part of the ecosystem, and we understand conservation as a way to sustain the resources that we rely on to feed our families, share our food, celebrate our catch and pass on our knowledge. This in turn provides spiritual balance, mental and physical well-being, traditional values, medicines, energy, identity, and overall cultural sustainability. The connection between the economy and a healthy environment is, for us, obvious.

As Inuit have used and occupied the Arctic for 1000's of year, we assume the responsibility to ensure meaningful and equitable roles for Inuit are built into any conservation efforts.

Protected and/or conserved areas developed through a conservation economy approach creates meaningful jobs in Inuit-led research, monitoring, as stewards, for artisans and harvesters. This approach protects coastal communities from the impacts of climate change, improves the lives of Inuit, and empowers Inuit and strengthens Inuit culture and language.

It is critical that Inuit lead and have a meaningful role in the management of these areas so we can continue to use the resources that have always sustained us. Inuit management practices are rooted in Indigenous knowledge and continue to be used. They are focused on relationships and lead to a holistic and adaptive approach that is applied to decision-making.

I would like to give you three examples of the Inuit Conservation Economy. All three come from Nunavut, my home region.

**Tallurutiup Imanga** (also known as Lancaster Sound) is one of the most biologically diverse marine region in the Canadian Arctic and a culturally important region for Inuit in the Qikiqtani region but also for Inuit across Inuit Nunaat- as the oceans are connected and the marine mammals are dependent on a functioning marine system. This marine region sometimes called the “Serengeti of the Arctic,” Tallurutiup Imanga is ecologically important due to the presence of polynyas, which attract large numbers of Arctic birds and marine mammals, and as an important migration route through the Canadian archipelago.

Among other animals, the region is home to approximately 75 percent of the world’s narwhal population. This diversity and ecological wealth also makes the sound important for the 3,600 Inuit who live in five communities in the region.

On the northernmost shores of Canada, **Tuvaijittuq** (“The Place Where the Ice Never Melts”) is projected to be the last place in the Arctic with year-round sea ice as the region warms. For that reason, it is likely to become a refuge for the marine mammals Inuit depend on that depend on the sea ice, such as walrus, seals and polar bears, leading to calls for its protection.

Closely associated with Tuvaijittuq and building on the Inuit Circumpolar Council’s 2017 **Pikialasorsuaq** Commission recommendations, QIA is negotiating with the Government of Canada an interim Marine Protected Area called Sarvarjuaq. This area will cover the Canadian side of the Pikialasorsuaq. Canada and Inuit are in discussions with Government Greenland and Kingdom of Denmark on a bi-national agreement for this area.

The proposed **Qikiqtait Protected and Conserved Area** lies further south, on the Belcher Islands in Hudson Bay. There, the community of Sanikiluaq has been promoting a conservation area to be named Qikiqtait, to protect the archipelago and the surrounding waters, which are an important habitat for many animals and in particular the eider ducks which have formed a central part of the identity of Sanikilmiut – providing clothing and food security and a small-scale developing economy using the eider down. The Qikiqtait project, is a joint effort by the Municipality of Sanikiluaq, the Sanikiluaq Hunters and Trappers Association (HTA), and the Arctic Eider Society, combining conservation and development goals in the same mold as the other projects referred to above.

The Central Arctic Ocean Treaty, signed by Canada, The Kingdom of Denmark (in respect of Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Norway, the Russian Federation, the United States of America, China, Japan and South Korea – note not all Arctic states but also “near “ Arctic states such as claimed by China. The interest in this region is propelled by the potential opportunities for fisheries in the high seas. The value of the agreement is it is a precautionary approach – by understanding an ecosystem-based approach to the region for an economic interest – fisheries - and is the first international treaty to consider Indigenous Knowledge as equal to scientific knowledge. The CAO agreement is also significant because it involved Inuit during its formulation and recognizes the on-going role of Indigenous Peoples in its implementation.

These projects are important examples of community and regional Inuit leadership which promote Inuit conservation economy principles. They show that economic benefits do not just have to come from resource extraction or tourism -- but rather can come from communities

and be transformative – building sustainable economies, healthy communities and keep Arctic resources and revenue in the Arctic.