

SECURING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE IN THE ARCTIC

Engaging and training the next generation of northern leaders
Executive Summary



CAROLEE BUCKLER, LINDA WRIGHT AND LAURA NORMAND

iisd International
Institute for
Sustainable
Development Institut
international du
développement
durable



For 10 years (1999–2009), IISD has engaged and trained young professionals from across the circumpolar North who are now moving into positions of responsibility in the Arctic region, and will ultimately lead their generation.



In 1998, the Arctic Council endorsed the Future of Children and Youth in the Arctic Initiative. Mary Simon, Valerie Hume, Carolee Buckler and Heather Creech brought forward the idea of training and supporting emerging northern leaders under this initiative. At the time, we realized there were very few programs that focused on helping northern youth acquire the knowledge, skills and experience needed to address sustainable development issues in their communities. This was the start of the Circumpolar Young Leaders program.

In 1999, in cooperation with the Arctic Council's Sustainable Development Working Group and with support from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, IISD launched this new experiential learning program. Four youth between the ages of 20 and 30 from across northern Canada embarked on a six-month unforgettable learning journey which took them to countries around the world.

With support from the Aboriginal and Circumpolar Affairs Division at Foreign Affairs Canada and the International Polar Year Federal Program Office, the CYL program continues to build the capacity of young northerners by combining training in Arctic issues, communications and leadership with peer networking and work experience at organizations involved in circumpolar issues. Through hands-on training and experience, the CYL program addresses the urgency to build the leadership of young northerners to meet the critical environmental, economic and social issues facing the region. Since its inception, 44 young

Canadian northerners, two Finns and one Russian have participated in the CYL program, many of them moving on to become leaders in their communities.

In 2008, we surveyed former CYL participants to find out what impact the program had on them. Out of the 18 people who responded to the survey, **72%** of respondents said that participation in the CYL program has helped to fast-track their career development and we found that the same number of respondents **72%** are currently working on sustainability issues in the North. At the time of the survey, **61%** were still living in Canada's North with another **39%** living outside of the North, with a majority of those continuing to work or study northern issues. **The people who have gone through this program stay focused on the North for the long term.**

In 2008–09, IISD explored how other organizations are helping to shape the next generation of leaders in the North. This executive summary, and the comprehensive report from which it is drawn, provides an overview of existing training programs for northern youth; examines what has worked up to now; identifies the existing gaps and barriers; and makes recommendations on what will be needed in the future.



SHARING THE VISION

IISD is not alone in its efforts to train young northern leaders. There are several other organizations that work to enhance the confidence, capacity and skills of northern youth, equipping them to assume the many leadership opportunities that exist in the North. These initiatives that involve young people may range from a one-week training course to field work, from office experience to internships to conferences. The programs may be funded by governments, the institution or organization that offers them, or they may be supported by independent fundraising. There is a diversity of approaches, including the following types of programming:

- *Studying in another circumpolar country (North2North)*
- *Opportunities to volunteer in southern Canada (Northern Youth Abroad)*
- *Scholarships (Diavik Diamond Mines Inc.)*
- *Learning expeditions (Students on Ice, Schools on Board)*
- *Internships with northern Canadian employers (NSERC, Yukon Grad Corps)*
- *School programs (Nunavut Sivuniksavut Training Program)*
- *Seminars and conferences (Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich'in Council International)*
- *Award recognition programs (National Aboriginal Achievement Awards, NAHO Role Model Program)*

Some of these programs have similar objectives; they want to empower the next generation in the North to become a force in the region's move towards a sustainable future. The main differences are in target audience (age ranges, educational levels); length and type of experience; and whether the program is local, national or international in scope.

Overall, the programs reviewed have demonstrated success in building the capacities of northern youth. Collectively, the programs have achieved the following:

- *Participants often continue on to complete high school.*
- *Participants often pursue post-secondary education.*
- *Participants have success in acquiring gainful employment following completion of the programs.*
- *Programs tend to fast-track youth into positions of more responsibility in the North.*
- *Programs impart specific skills and knowledge, e.g., communication skills, transregional and geo-political awareness, enhanced understanding of global institutions and processes, understanding the linkages between science and traditional knowledge, bridging cultures, and teamwork.*
- *Participants report increased confidence and connection to their culture and community.*

In the past 11 years, nearly 600 youth have participated in these programs. Participants are forming talented, motivated networks to help lead the North. But we need to work with many more young northerners and help them gain entry to the fora where decisions are made so they can learn, and ultimately lead.

One of the greatest challenges for the circumpolar world is how to engage and build capacity in its youth, the demographic that will ultimately bear the responsibility for implementing the region's emerging policies and programs that are necessary for sustainable development.



“Our program has a 93% high school graduation rate among our alumni. NYA is committed not only to the personal development of northern youth, but also to the development of strong and vital northern communities.”

Rebecca Bisson, Program Director, Northern Youth Abroad



THE URGENT NEED TO SUPPORT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN YOUTH



In recent decades, the Arctic has undergone major environmental, socio-economic and political changes. For example, the Arctic is experiencing escalating and well-publicized environmental impacts as a result of both industrial expansion and climate change. The rapid loss of Arctic ice is having negative consequences on northern communities and lifestyles, on iconic species such as the polar bear, and is altering the ecology of the Arctic Ocean and the permafrost. The geo-political fabric of the North is also shifting, as countries begin to lay claim to exclusive economic zones in northern waters and as indigenous peoples secure increased rights to self-government.

The Arctic has also been experiencing growth in the non-indigenous population, an increase in urban centres, and rapid expansion in the transportation, communication, oil and gas, mining and forestry sectors. These changes have resulted in significant growth in the economy and in non-traditional employment, especially in the extractive resources sector. Despite the great wealth that has been extracted from the Arctic through diamond, oil and resource exploitation, impoverished communities remain, and the rights of some indigenous peoples remain under threat.

Since the early 1990s, there has been increasing cooperation between the eight circumpolar countries (Norway, Finland, Greenland/Denmark, Russia, USA, Canada, Sweden and Iceland), which has culminated in the establishment of

inter-governmental organizations such as the Arctic Council and the Northern Forum. The increased attention to the North comes with opportunities, but it also comes with responsibilities. Northern communities will need to determine how they will engage and interact with these new models for cooperation. In particular, Northern youth will have the added responsibility to be reflective and accessible to their communities in order to represent community realities to regional regimes.

Across the North, the majority of the population is under the age of 30. Youth make up more than half of the Arctic's indigenous population and is acknowledged as one of the world's fastest growing demographic groups. Furthermore, 62%ⁱ of the population of Nunavut, 48%ⁱⁱ of the population in Northwest Territories and 38%ⁱⁱⁱ of population in the Yukon are under the age of 30. This demographic group will ultimately be responsible for shaping the future of the region. In fact, some of them are already in positions of influence. As stakeholders, young people in the North need to be equipped with the proper knowledge and skills required for tackling these challenges. New ways of thinking are required to ensure the sustainable development of the North. The time is now to engage the next generation. Training such a large generation of young people for active citizenry in a region strained by global warming and other sustainability challenges is critical to the future stability of the North.

“The mentorship aspect of my internship and the networks with which I was able to get involved were probably the most important things that I gained. I made connections with other international research institutes and university researchers. I decided to pursue an MA when I returned to Canada. My current employment is also related to my internship since I was a junior researcher at CICERO and have taken on a junior researcher/project coordinator position at Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK).”

Meghan McKenna, former CYL intern

ⁱ Nunavut Bureau of Statistics; Nunavut total population estimates by single years of age, 1999–2008 as of July 1, 2008. Available at <http://www.gov.nu.ca/eia/stats/stats.html>

ⁱⁱ Northwest Territories Bureau of Statistics; Census 2006 Age and Sex; T-STAT; July 17, 2007. Available at http://www.stats.gov.nt.ca/Statinfo/Census/census%2006/Age%20and%20Sex_2006.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Yukon Bureau of Statistics; Population Report: December 2008; Yukon Executive Council Office; Bureau of Statistics. Available at http://www.eco.gov.yk.ca/stats/pdf/population_dec_2008.pdf

THE ROLE OF EMERGING LEADERS IN THE NORTH

We believe that responding to this challenge will require a decentralized large-scale capacity building initiative. But first, we need to look at the characteristics required for taking on a leadership role in the northern context.

Leadership was historically viewed as being related to positions within power structures. Leadership is more than that. Leadership can come from all levels of society, and we find leaders in our Elders, our youth, our schools, our communities and families. Leadership is reflected in ingenuity, innovation, ideas, strength of character and commitment to the well-being of the community and society that surrounds us. Leaders are not necessarily those who are the most outspoken; in fact, many of the leaders making a difference are quiet and working behind the scenes.

To develop a list of the characteristics that are required for leaders in the North, IISD interviewed past participants of the Circumpolar Young Leaders program as well as others working on training. This list was compiled from feedback that was given by respondents for this survey and is by no means an exhaustive list, but it does highlight some of the key characteristics in leaders in the North.

Key characteristics of leaders in the North

- *Able to envision the future and communicate it in a manner that is understandable and motivational to others.*
- *Able to lead by example.*
- *Able to view leadership as shared, understanding that the contributions of others are vital and that success comes from collaborative efforts.*
- *Must have an innate understanding of the northern context, a robust understanding of the North's history, cultures, communities, languages and nuances.*
- *In northern communities, leaders are entwined and accountable to the communities where they live. They must be able to use their social networks and relationships as a means to both further their region's objectives/goals and ensure that the decisions are reflective of the needs and desires of their communities.*
- *Must have intercultural communication skills, as leaders need to be able to successfully collaborate with culturally diverse communities as well as local, territorial, national and multilateral political bodies.*
- *Must be able to balance a community perspective with a global perspective.*
- *Should be modest and respectful.*



“During this time of uncertainty, the North requires not just more direction but more young northerners in positions of leadership. People at all levels must be empowered to share northern leadership responsibilities.”

Linda Wright, former CYL intern



BARRIERS FOR YOUNG LEADERS

Our research uncovered a series of barriers that young people from the North face in their journey towards leadership and self-development. These barriers must be addressed if we want to ramp up the engagement and training of young people in the North.

- 1] Formal education** – The curriculum at the elementary and secondary levels is currently biased towards a southern worldview. This includes the teaching of history, language, culture and values. Dropout rates are rampant at the secondary level, there are no universities physically located in the North and available college programming is limited. Furthermore, leadership development is not widely covered in the education curriculum.
- 2] Community and family support** – The historical and recent changes occurring in the North are placing unprecedented stress on the community fabric. Some families are reluctant to have their children leave the community to further their education because of the emotional scars associated with the Inuit and First Nations relocation to residential schools. Some communities are currently wrestling with social issues; these strain the community's social safety net and draw resources away from promoting opportunities, and further developing young people's capacities to take on leadership roles.
- 3] Lack of role models in the North** – The adults in a society are in a position of influence for the younger generation; in every community, adult role models emerge. The North is currently facing a shortage of northern role models due to the fact that people in key positions, (e.g., police, nurses, doctors and government bureaucrats) in the North are being imported from the South. As the number of indigenous legislators, lawyers, teachers, nurses, doctors, trades people and others increases, we can expect youth aspirations and expectations to rise.
- 4] Low confidence level** – The respondents mentioned that many northern youth suffer from low self-esteem and a lack of confidence, especially when considering pursuing opportunities that are outside of their communities and that differ from their previous experience. "We have discovered that a lot of young people... are afraid to show that they can make a difference in their community and they are not aware of how important they are," says Rebecca Bisson, Program Director, Northern Youth Abroad.
- 5] Disconnect with government and leaders in the North** – The youth feel that their voice is not being recognized or heard by the public or civil society. They are tired of being included in a token or symbolic role. Integrating the voice and opinions of youth helps empower them, while not listening encourages apathy. Northern youth need more opportunities for their voices to be heard and to feel that their input and ideas are valuable. This will give them the power to influence their lives and their communities.
- 6] Programming that can foster leadership and capacity is not readily available across the North at the community level** – Programming at the community level is essential for those who do not want to leave their community or are unable to leave. There has been a trend of devolution of government services and responsibilities to the community level; the same can, and should, be done for leadership training and capacity building.
- 7] Lack of awareness of opportunities for northern youth** – According to the respondents, northern youth are not as aware as they could be of the many opportunities that are available to them. This is particularly acute in remote communities where youth have limited access to high-speed Internet and information.
- 8] Gaining access to entry-level positions and making the transition to mid-level positions** – In our research, we have discovered that there is a predominant focus on preparing workers for entry-level positions. But, as a result, there is also now an overabundance of individuals in entry-level positions who are facing barriers in transitioning to higher levels, leaving no openings for new employees, and too many vacancies for more seasoned and senior staff.

These barriers act as a significant impediment to the quantity of potential leaders that can emerge—leaders who can address the existing and imminent challenges of achieving sustainable development in the North.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The programs mentioned earlier are all laudable, however in order to address the morass of issues that the North is currently facing, a more concentrated, expanded and coordinated effort is required to overcome the barriers and to increase the number of emerging leaders in the region. Specifically, we recommend:

- **The governments of the North should create a Regional Leadership Strategy.** This could be done through a regional dialogue held between the relevant government departments, youth representatives, First Nations and Inuit governments and organizations, and civil society organizations that deliver capacity-building programming in the North. This dialogue would be used to create a comprehensive leadership strategy that would facilitate and guide future efforts.
- **Incorporate the teaching of leadership skills throughout all levels of education and include both northern indigenous and western teachings on leadership.** The intent is for youth to become adept and proficient in “two worlds.” Students should be given tasks that hone skills and provide experience. Youth in the North need to have both hard and soft skills, and they need the tools to assist them in becoming change agents for the North.
- **Further research needs to be conducted on the key skills that are required for leadership across all sectors in the North.** The identification of these key skills has implications for current and future training practices, in formal and non-formal education, as it is important to ensure that efforts are continuing to achieve the goal of building the capacity of emerging northern leaders.
- **Make ongoing professional development and continual learning opportunities available.** Learning is a life-long journey, where different skills are required at different times and career stages. To ensure that the leaders of tomorrow are equipped with the proper skills, capacity building has to be a continual process. Improving internal support structures for employees in government, non-profit organizations and the private sector in the North would be one way to do this. For example, training could be provided through the creation of mentorship programs, providing internal skills development workshops, and developing training budgets and allowing young employees access to funds to support their professional development.
- **Give northern youth a stake in their future. Opportunities for youth to participate in the decision-making processes need to be broadened.** Youth can bring ideas, passion and innovation to the various levels of decision-making and this, in turn, provides an opportunity for the youth to gain a stake in decisions that affect their future while building their capacity. An initiative in 2008 by Foreign Affairs Canada has brought northern youth representation to the Canadian delegation to the Arctic Council. This is a step in the right direction.
- **Create widespread mentorship programs for young people.** Our work has identified a strong need to provide more young people in the North with access to role models/mentors. Increasing the number of mentorship programs available in the North can provide youth with increased self confidence and inspire them to make a difference in their communities. Mentors can be a wonderful source of advice and inspiration for young people, and stewarding intergenerational relationships sustains current endeavours. Mentors can come from all walks of life, they can be Elders, adults or youth peers.
- Through this study, we found that only a limited number of the youth capacity-building programs are managed and owned by First Nations and Inuit groups. **More ownership of these programs by First Nations and Inuit organizations is required.** For example, there could be the development of a Training Centre for Indigenous Peoples of the North that has a youth focus. Based in the North, this training centre could be collectively managed by the indigenous groups of the North. It would provide leadership training; skills-based learning (conflict resolution communication skills, teamwork, etc.); as well as provide the tools and knowledge necessary to participate in decision-making at the local, national and international level, including information on sustainable development, the political processes, etc. The value-added dimension of a collectively managed centre would be the fact that it would further nurture the pan-indigenous identity of the North.
- **To scale up our efforts in building northern capacity, access to post-secondary education opportunities needs to be expanded.** There is a strong rationale, even an imperative, to build a university in the North, so that the youth are not forced to leave the North in order to pursue a university degree. Existing colleges also need to extend their reach so that students can acquire their degrees from their home communities. The programming offered needs to meet the changing needs of the North.
- **Although many more local youth programs exist at the community level than in the past, it is clear from this study that more local programs are needed.** Programs need to be both youth-focused and youth-driven, and should be rooted in the communities. Programs of this nature have the potential to build confidence, life and leadership skills, and nurture social entrepreneurship at the community level.
- **Existing capacity development programs that are doing an excellent job should be supported and scaled up, but with greater attention to collaboration.** More opportunities for synergies and cooperation across these programs are required. Instead of the programs acting as discrete units and possibly replicating efforts, organizations providing training to northern youth should be learning from each other and exploring new innovations. All of these organizations are working towards a common goal—fostering capacity in the next generation of the North. Sharing ideas and resources can reduce time and save money, thereby avoiding costly mistakes. These programs should work together to review and revise their programming based on careful and ongoing consultation with the changing youth demographic to ensure that the programs continue to meet the needs of the North. The programs need to have a long-term focus, with the understanding that support needs to be provided throughout training and after training.



FUTURE OF THE NORTH

Becoming a northern leader and a force for change takes knowledge, skill and commitment. Northern young people today are learning more than ever about the state of our world, but they need to know that they can make a difference and they need to acquire the skills and the networks to do so. It is highly unlikely that any one approach will adequately address the critical need to develop young northern leaders. Indeed, what is likely called for is a long-term strategy, one that employs a variety of approaches. The North needs a broad and diversified approach to nurturing leaders across sectors, issues and communities.



“The North is facing some critical social, environmental and economic challenges and will need a cadre of integrally-trained, cross-culturally informed, regionally and globally aware northern leaders to address them. The sustainability challenge is a leadership challenge and we need to increase our training efforts for leaders of tomorrow, today.”

Carolee Buckler, Project Manager, IISD

For further information about IISD’s Arctic leadership initiatives, please contact:

Carolee Buckler, Project Manager
International Institute for Sustainable Development
161 Portage Avenue East, 6th floor
Winnipeg, MB R3B 0Y4
Phone: (204) 958-7748 | Fax: (204) 958 7710
cbuckler@iisd.ca



iisd International Institute for Sustainable Development Institut international du développement durable