

James Ford



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Climate change and food security in regional Inuit centers

Summary

Food insecurity is a chronic problem affecting many Inuit communities and is likely to predispose Inuit food systems to the negative effects of climate change. Using in-depth case studies, this project will identify and characterize the vulnerability of food systems in four regional Inuit centers (RIC) (Iqaluit, Arviat, Inuvik and Kuujjuak) to climate change as a basis for identifying adaptation entry points.



Country food cooking

The work will focus specifically on the food security of at-risk populations within RICs in a changing climate, defined to include individuals who use community food programs on a regular basis and who by definition experience chronic food insecurity.



Photovoice workshop

The project has five primary objectives:

- 1) Document and describe the nature of food insecurity among at-risk populations in RICs
- 2) Characterize the environmental, biological and socio-economic determinants of their food insecurity
- 3) Document coping strategies to manage food shortages
- 4) Examine the pathways through which climate change might affect food insecurity for at-risk peoples in RICs
- 5) Identify opportunities and priorities for adaptation intervention in the context of rapid current and future change.

The project will work closely with community members, has established partnerships with a number of regional and community organizations.

Study site locations



Iqaluit, Arviat, Inuvik and Kuujjuak

Local collaborations

Gwen Healey, Qaujigiartiit Health
Research Centre (AHRN-NU), Iqaluit,
NU

Shirley Tagalik, Arviat Health Committee, Arviat, Nunavut

David Wilman and Elisapi Davidee-Aningmiqu, Iqaluit Tukisigiavik Society, Iqaluit, Nunavut

Susan Chatwood, Institute for Circumpolar Health Research, Yellowknife, NWT

Questions to Researchers

ArcticNet recognizes the importance of framing climate change issues from various perspectives. Below we are asking a few questions to the project leaders in order to identify scientific priority issues and demonstrate how the research results can be used by policy and decision-makers in terms of community and climate change adaptation planning in the Eastern Canadian Arctic.

1) From your own research perspective can you identify and describe the key issues that are (will be?) affecting social, economic or environmental conditions in the Eastern Canadian Arctic?

In this project we are focusing on some of the most vulnerable people in the North: those who have to use food programs to meet their nutritional needs. Particularly in the large Inuit settlements, this population is growing rapidly, a function of immigration from other communities and natural population growth. Moreover, as economic development advances in the North and average incomes increase, an increasing number of people are being left behind. Research in other contexts and smaller Inuit communities suggests that the socio-economically marginalized are at greatest risk with climate change. In the RICs, however, we have no idea – no projects have examined the issue.

2) How will your ArcticNet project contribute to a better understanding of these issues affecting the Eastern Canadian Arctic?

We are working with community food programs to find out who is using these support mechanisms and why. Specifically, we are trying to characterize how the food system operates for some of the most vulnerable peoples, characterizing the role of store and traditional foods, and socio-economic-cultural factors. This baseline understanding will help us identify pathways through which climate change and other stresses might affect food security of vulnerable peoples.

As of summer 2010 we have completed our Photovoice workshops, where we asked users of community food programs to describe, through photography, what affected what they ate and the quantity of food they ate. These workshops identified traditional foods and access to community programs as factors enhancing food security, whereas substance abuse and the high price of food in the Arctic were seen as negatively affecting food security.

These pictures are being presented, with the consent of the participants, at the Iqaluit Museum during the summer 2010. We then interviewed 92 regular users of community food programs (Food Bank, Soup Kitchen and Tukisigiavik, a drop-in center) during the month of May 2010 and are in the process of analysing this data. We are currently working to develop the projects in the other three communities.

3) Provide an example of how the results of your project may contribute to the decision-making process with respect to these issues.

One of the interesting aspects of photovoice is that it provides community members from marginalized groups with the possibility of voicing their concerns and generates ideas to influence decisions and policies that affect their lives.

The photovoice workshops we conducted highlighted the importance of community programs to enhance the food security and well-being of some of the most vulnerable peoples in Iqaluit. We are hoping that this type of information can be used by policy makers in Iqaluit, but also other regions of the Arctic, to develop programs that address the needs of these particular groups.

General information

Contact us if you have suggestions, feedback or questions regarding the research projects presented in this newsletter.

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Upcoming Newsletter

Researcher

Steven Ferguson

Research project

Research on Arctic marine mammals

