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**Climate Change  
and Arctic Sustainable Development :  
scientific, social, cultural and educational challenges**

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## **ABSTRACT: CIRCUMPOLAR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

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### **Climate Change and Sustainable Development in Canada's Northern Communities**

This presentation will discuss the impact of climate change in light of the challenges currently facing sustainable development in Canada's Northern communities. The first part will outline current research on the social and economic impacts of climate change on the region. The second part will attempt to answer the question of what needs to be done to ensure a comprehensive, interdisciplinary and multi-actor approach to achieving sustainable development in the Arctic. The final part of the presentation will deal with the modalities required for a long-term and sustained approach to addressing sustainable development in the Arctic and the need for a concerted effort at the increasing involvement of communities in the generation, transfer, and utilisation of knowledge relating to sustainable futures.

Few societies have undergone economic transformations with the rapidity that communities in Canada's north have over the past 100 years. These communities have moved from an economy based almost entirely on subsistence hunting and fishing, to an economy dominated by the industrial exploitation of natural resources, to an uncertain future in a world increasingly dominated by a knowledge-based post-industrial culture. These changes have introduced a great deal of stress accompanied by social and economic problems. Recent trends have increased the likelihood of challenges to a sustainable future but some have also offered promise for these communities to become increasingly involved in finding solutions to these challenges. Climate change is proving to add to these challenges. The central problem concerning climate change is that it is extremely difficult to determine its social and economic impacts.

There is good research being done on the impacts of climate change on health and food security. A changing climate is seen to have a possible negative affect on access to country foods. This would lead to less healthy diets and economic and cultural

problems. There is very little direct research looking at the economic or social impacts of climate change from the perspective of sustainable development. Recent studies examining the impacts of climate change on the vulnerability, adaptability, and the resilience of these communities is providing some information but much needs to be done.

Part of the problem stems from the fact that for many of these communities there are issues that are seen as more important than climate change. These communities suffer from many social pathologies that are difficult to attribute to climate change. Indeed, considering the past, it is not inconceivable that climate change might offer positive options. Additional evidence suggests that there is a great deal of variation between communities as far as climate change and its impacts is concerned.

The one issue around which a consensus seems to be developing is that greater community involvement and empowerment is the most sensible long term solution. Any strategy regarding the sustainability of communities in the Canadian Arctic needs to discuss ways of increasing human, social, and physical capital.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Very little research exists on the social and economic impacts of climate change on sustainability. A new research initiative looking at the issue in relation to the other challenges to sustainability would be welcome.
- Climate change is often seen as a less important problem than other issues facing their community. Climate change has to be understood as one of many challenges these communities are facing.
- Greater community involvement and empowerment through increasing human, social, and physical capital is the most sensible long term solution. Researchers, governments, and communities themselves must increase efforts to improve community empowerment through local knowledge generation, transfer, and utilisation.
- A new international initiative building on the work of the ACIA and other previous initiatives would greatly assist in bringing attention to the challenges facing the sustainability of communities in the Arctic.