

Sharing research findings in Nunavut: A tool to track the use and integration of community-based knowledge about food (in)security

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Northern residents have had a long history of having to deal with and adapt to issues of food (in)security. Climate change, in addition to – for example, issues such as the inflated cost of store bought foods, high levels of suicide, low levels of health status, and the presence of contaminants in country foods, are some of the many problems that exacerbate an already difficult situation. In 2007, The Government of Canada issued a mandate to assess “key vulnerabilities and health impacts related to climate change in Northern / Inuit populations”. In response, from 2008-2011, Health Canada funded Northern First Nations and Inuit communities to conduct community-based research on climate change and health adaptation. Increasingly, academics and policy-makers are seeking out local sources of knowledge from indigenous and non-indigenous peoples about what adaptation strategies are best suited to their local land and environment. What is relatively understudied is how findings based on northerner-led projects are being integrated into government programs that deal with the root issue of food (in)security.

This is a very new project initiated only this year and our research team has just recently developed and applied a new set of protocols. Our data management interests pertain to issues of knowledge translation as science (research) is moved forward into policy outcomes (action). The main objective of this project is to better understand communications between climate change and health policy stakeholders operating at local, territorial and national levels in Canada. We are interested in understanding how information about food (in)security is being exchanged from community-based researchers to various policy actors who are concerned with climate change and food security in Nunavut. In particular, how might intended messages from the community level be transformed, leading to possible misinterpretations, as research findings are shared?

We aim to support community-research groups or those interested in disseminating and using community-based research from the Canadian Arctic. We are doing this by describing what happens to results from northerner-led projects and by developing a way to track, using techniques from social network analysis, the exchange of different types of knowledge such as local (e.g., observations of changing environments and migratory patterns), traditional (e.g., lessons from elders), or scientific (e.g., changes in the population dynamics and ecology of harvested wildlife). Currently, we are co-producing a knowledge tracking guidebook, scheduled for completion in early 2012, outlining our procedure and other protocols related to the validation, storage and dissemination of our data. This technique was recently applied for the first time August to October 2011, in collaboration with the Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre, by tracking a core message and corresponding interpretation of an image from their photovoice project on climate change and health in Nunavut.

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