



## **Food Sovereignty and Self-Governance – Inuit Role in Managing Arctic Marine Resources**

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**Summary:** Inuit food security is founded upon a holistic understanding of the Arctic – one in which Inuit are a part of the ecosystem and their physical, cultural, mental and spiritual health are profoundly related to the environment. In 2016, we completed the Alaska Inuit-led Food Security Project. A key project finding stressed the undeniable connection between food *sovereignty* and food *security*. “Food sovereignty” is the right of Inuit to define their own hunting, gathering, fishing, land and water policies; the right to define what is sustainably, socially, economically and culturally appropriate for the distribution of food and to maintain ecological health...<sup>1</sup> - Without food sovereignty, we cannot realize food security.

**Statement of Need:** The key recommendation derived from the final Food Security report is to analyze management and co-management structures within Inuit Nunaat and to understand how those governing frameworks support or need to be modified to achieve Inuit food sovereignty. Due to the rapid and immense changes underway in the Arctic, there is a need to enhance Inuit governance structures to ensure direct involvement of Inuit and their rights and interests throughout their homelands. This need is not based solely on existing federal obligations to Indigenous peoples, nor on reasons of social justice, but is also justified by the expertise and knowledge that Inuit bring to natural resource management. In response to these needs and recommendations, the Food Sovereignty and Self Governance project aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of existing and emerging frameworks supporting Inuit self-governance over marine food resources.

**Objectives and Outcomes:** This project intends to examine the potential for Inuit, living in Alaska and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region (ISR) of Canada, to manage and co-manage important subsistence resources of the Arctic region, and to further identify the tools that Inuit communities need to sustain the overall integrity of their communities. The project will achieve the following objectives:

- Synthesize and evaluate existing frameworks for Inuit management and co-management of subsistence resources presently reflected in law, policies and legal authorities in the United States (U.S.) and ISR, Canada;

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<sup>1</sup> Inuit Circumpolar Council-Alaska. 2015. Alaskan Inuit Food Security Conceptual Framework: How to Assess the Arctic From an Inuit Perspective. Technical Report. Anchorage, AK. The food sovereignty definition presented here accounts for all points identified by Alaskan Inuit and has been adapted from the definition written by Hamm and Bellows in First Nations Development Institute’s Food Sovereignty Assessment Tool, 2004 and in addition to the definition provided in the Declaration of Nyéléni (2007).

- Evaluate how existing Inuit self-governance is operationalized by examining four co-management case studies focused on marine resources that are aimed at ensuring food sovereignty, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the social, political, and institutional parameters affecting implementation of key legal frameworks;
- Assess how Inuit self-governance supports food security by evaluating food sovereignty objectives against the existing legal and structural frameworks and their effective implementation and outcomes

The 2.5-year project is led by Carolina Behe (ICC Alaska), Dalee Sambo Dorrough (University of Alaska) and David Roche (The Environmental Law Institute) and conducted in partnership with the Eskimo Walrus Commission, the Kuskokwim River Inter Tribal Fisheries Commission, the Inuvialuit Game Council and the Fisheries Joint Management Committee. Additionally, the Association of Village Council Presidents and the Inuit Circumpolar Canada will participate through the project advisory committee.

Working through the four case studies, The Project Team will conduct a legal analysis (looking at what is on the books) and working with Inuit who are directly engaged in the management and co-management of salmon and walrus in Alaska and char and beluga in the ISR. The Team will further review policy, and institutional structures and processes related to Inuit self-governance of marine resources to better understand opportunities and barriers based both on the legal system and existing practice.

The Project will utilize Indigenous Knowledge and social science methodologies and will intimately engage with Inuit who play a role in natural resources management under each case study—all guided by input provided by an expert Advisory Committee. Project outcomes will be used to inform Inuit, state/territorial, and national policy-makers and resource managers about existing approaches, strengths and weaknesses, and the potential opportunities for enhancing Inuit self-governance.

*No opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.*

