

RIGHTS FOR ACTION

Putting People at the Centre of Action on Climate Change



CASE STUDY 2: THE RIGHT TO FOOD

Adaptation action in the Arctic informed by the right to food

Arctic Inuit view food security as a right that encompasses the cultural and environmental aspects of their lives. In this photo: Members of the Nunavut community with their dog sledge. (Credit: Sara Statham, Government of Nunavut)

This case study is compiled as part of the resource "Rights for Action", first published by the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice in August 2015. The full resource is available on www.mrfcj.org.

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The increasing cost of imported food and the impacts of climate change on traditional foods are leading to food insecurity for Inuit people in Nunavut in the Canadian Arctic. Leese Papatsie who lives in Nunavut articulates the challenges her community faces:

“There are 3 people living in our household, we spend about 500 Canadian dollars per week to feed ourselves and others (Inuit will share their food to family members, this is the norm for us). For example, frozen concentrated juice can cost CAN \$8.59. We are lucky compared to other families as both my husband and I have jobs and we have a house. Nunavummiut (the people of Nunavut) struggle to put food on the table and a lot of people are trapped in a vicious circle - they get paid, pay the bills and buy food, but often have to borrow money for food before their next payday. So when a person gets paid, they have to pay back their loan, pay bills leaving little money to buy food. Many households have one or two working folks supporting 8 to 10 people.

Changes in weather are also making it difficult for Inuit to harvest animals. One year, we tried to go fishing through the sea ice. The travel conditions were so poor, we had to turn back but normally this would have been a good time to travel and fish¹.”

In 2012 the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food visited Canada and highlighted cases of acute food and nutrition insecurity amongst households in Nunavut, with studies showing that 70% of school children live in food insecure homes. The impacts of climate change on the availability of traditional foods is an important contributor to the causes of poor nutrition, alongside rising food prices.

Canadian Inuit rights are conceptualised and codified through treaties, land claims and human rights obligations at national and international level. To realise these rights Inuit people need to be empowered to shape decision making related to their natural resources. One example of this empowerment in practice is the Nunavut Food Security Coalition² which is working to ensure access to healthy and affordable food for the community, empower the Nunavummiut to produce food locally and ensure the active participation in decision making to develop a sustainable and long term approach to food security that respects the rights of local people.

The work of the coalition is complemented by a grassroots initiative led by Leese Papatsie called Feeding My Family. The group works to raise awareness, nationally and internationally, of the high cost of food in Nunavut; encourage community members to speak up and engage in decision making on food security and natural resource management; and promote local knowledge and traditions to tackle food insecurity and adapt to the impacts of climate change on traditional food sources.

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FACT: Findings from the 2007–2008 Nunavut Inuit Child Health Survey indicated that nearly 70% of Inuit preschoolers aged three to five lived in food insecure households, and 56% lived in households with child-specific food insecurity. Overall, 31% of children in Nunavut were moderately food insecure, and about one-quarter were severely food insecure³.

The Right to Food - Lessons learned

- a) Recognising the right to food triggered more sustained action on food and nutrition security by government and civil society. International human rights covenants can play an important role in informing and shaping national and subnational policies.
- b) Inclusive participation by local and indigenous people in decision making in collaboration with government and NGOs can help to inform decision making. Traditional rights, knowledge and culture can inform more effective policies and actions.

¹ MRFCJ (2013), *The right to food security in a changing Arctic* available at: <http://bit.ly/1K1KKuD>

² The Nunavut Food Security Coalition website can be found at: <http://bit.ly/1JVCQTC>

³ Egeland, G., Williamson-Bathory, L., Johnson-Down, L., & Sobol, I. (2011). Traditional food and monetary access to market-food: Correlates of food insecurity among Inuit preschoolers. *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, 70(4), 373-383.