

# Indigenous Peoples and Sustainable Development in the Canadian Arctic

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## INTRODUCTION

The journey commences with preparations for the 1992 Rio Summit in cooperation with Indigenous peoples globally. Long before Rio, the Government of Canada and northern Indigenous communities had begun processes to lay the institutional foundations to empower and build capacity in these communities. This monograph reviews some of the progress since Rio in relation to this complex work, which has been shaped by Canada's commitment to sustainable development. The Government of Canada believes institution and capacity building are integral steps in managing a growing array of environmental, economic, social, and cultural challenges faced by Indigenous communities in northern Canada.

While many of the processes described in this monograph are ongoing, there is a growing record of practical measures that Indigenous communities themselves are increasingly beginning to initiate and implement. A few of these are noted, and Web sites are provided for locating additional up-to-date information.

A summary of the 1999 report of Canada's Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development provides a context for some of the continuing challenges in this vast and remote region of Canada. While progress is understandably slow and incremental, there is room for optimism. The Government of Canada is committed to working in partnership with Indigenous peoples and northern governments to find practical ways to meet the challenges. Provincial and northern territorial governments, as well as nongovernmental organizations, businesses, and industries in northern Canada, are actively engaged in pursuing sustainable development and responsible

*"The pursuit of sustainable development can be understood as a journey. Guided by a need for better decision making, this journey is an exploration of new ways of thinking and acting that emerge as we integrate economic, environmental and social perspectives."*

—Commissioner of the Environment  
and Sustainable Development,  
1998 Report, para. 5.1

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### Notes:

The term "Indigenous" is the common international usage. In Canada, the term "Aboriginal" flows from Canada's Constitution of 1982, which includes North American Indians (First Nations) and Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

The words "Arctic" and "North" are used interchangeably throughout this monograph. They are not intended as precise geographic designations. Most of the issues reviewed are common to Indigenous communities in Canada's three northern territories and the northern parts of seven Canadian provinces.