

co-operatives, they provide a steady source of income to many communities.

Inuit community growth has provided jobs in community services, service and development industries, and government.

Many communities are too remote to allow the Inuit reasonable access to major labour markets. The problem of further diversifying the economy and providing meaningful employment for the young and growing Inuit population remains a challenge.

Political Awakening

Traditionally, the Canadian Inuit had few formal political structures. They remained largely outside the political systems that were introduced with the modernization of the North. For example, the Inuit had no vote in Canadian elections until 1962. But, concerned with regaining control over their lives and their future, the Inuit have become much more politically active. Most communities are now incorporated and governed by elected councils, similar to those in municipalities across Canada.

In the Northwest Territories, where the Inuit and other Aboriginal peoples form a majority of the population, Inuit are well represented in the Legislative Assembly and at the territorial ministerial level. In Canada's Parliament, Inuit members now sit in both the House of Commons and the Senate. Notable among the political organizations formed, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada speaks with a united voice on important economic, environmental and political issues of concern to the Inuit.

Canada's Inuit have also joined those of Greenland, Alaska and Russia to form the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, an international body addressing the key issues and

concerns of the entire arctic world.

A political accord and resulting legislation proclaimed in July 1993 will lead to a new, predominantly Inuit territory in Canada's North by 1999. The new territory, to be called Nunavut, will comprise roughly the eastern half of the present Northwest Territories (roughly three times the size of France) and will hold the same degree of political and economic sovereignty as the other northern territories.

Land Claims

As the North became more developed, conflicts over land ownership and rights inevitably emerged. Usually, land not privately owned belongs to the Government of Canada. But the Inuit have an historic claim to large tracts of land by virtue of their occupancy and use over many centuries.

Funds from the 1984 settlement of the Inuvialuit (western Arctic) land claim have also helped open up more opportunities to Inuit in that region. The final agreement provided 2 500 Inuvialuit with 91 000 km² of land, financial compensation, social development funding, hunting rights and a greater role in wildlife management, conservation and environmental protection. In 1993, a final agreement was reached with the Tungavik Federation of Nunavut — the largest comprehensive land claim to be settled in Canada. The agreement will provide some 17 500 Inuit with 350 000 km² of land, financial compensation, the right to share in resource royalties, hunting rights, and a greater role in the management of land and the environment.

Claims settlements have also been successfully reached with Inuit groups in the northern region of the province of Quebec. Negotiations are also under way with the Labrador Inuit Association, which represents

about 3800 Inuit living in the coastal, interior and offshore areas of northern Labrador (part of the province of Newfoundland).

Environmental Protection

Throughout the modern development of the Canadian North, the Inuit have been leaders in urging caution and concern for the effects of human activity on the arctic environment. They have a deeply rooted tradition of living in harmony with nature, understanding better than most the fragility of northern ecosystems.

Canadians have become aware that the North is no longer a remote, pristine area immune from the effects of industrialization. Contaminants caused by activities as far away as Europe have shown up in the environment and in the Inuit diet. In the years ahead, climate change and phenomena such as the "greenhouse effect" may profoundly change northern life.

The Inuit of Canada are working with the territorial and federal governments to understand and seek solutions to environmental issues affecting their homeland.

The Future

Canada's Inuit have shown a remarkable resilience in withstanding, absorbing and adapting to a very different culture without losing either their traditional values or their desire to remain a distinct and self-reliant society.

They have, in recent years, gained an important measure of political control. The settlement of their land claims and their work to create the new territory of Nunavut will provide a more solid base from which they can plan their future. 

