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THE TRANSFER OF ARCTIC-BASED RESEARCH AND SCIENCE COMMUNICATION METHODS TO TROPICAL CONTEXTS

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Arctic researchers are world leaders in the study of human health effects related to the presence of environmental contaminants in food webs. The Circumpolar Arctic provides multiple study sites where communities rely on a traditional diet, based to a large degree on hunting high trophic level species. Issues of bioaccumulation and biomagnification are constantly present. In communicating their findings back to the members of the communities within which the research was conducted, scientists often find the need to nuance their communication and to take into account the cultural and health effects of a giving up a traditional diet as well as the health and environmental effects of whatever alternative diet might be prescribed.

Methods of research on these subjects and strategies for the communication of scientific findings pioneered in the Arctic have been applied to similar environmental and human health issues that are under investigation in the “Global South.” While the application of research methods and the communication of science can rarely be transferred from one geographical context without adaptation to the local natural, cultural, and political environment, the methods that have been developed in the Arctic have served well to inform the research and communication of science in more southerly locations.

This paper describes one such case of the transfer of science and communication methods from the Arctic and sub-Arctic to the tropics. This case focuses specifically on research related to mercury (Hg) and methyl-mercury (meHg) contamination in the tissues of cetaceans that are hunted for human consumption. Research and communication methods developed in Canada, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Japan have informed science as it is conducted and communicated in St. Vincent and the Grenadines—an archipelagic country in the Caribbean where short-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala macrorhynchus*) and other small cetaceans are hunted for food by the local people.