

Breakout session

Group 3, Thursday, September 25, 2008

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There were three areas of discussion that our breakout session centered on:

1. Health and food issues in the Arctic
2. The need to integrate traditional knowledge and modern knowledge
3. How the Arctic Council could be used as a platform to further discuss the ideas that are raised here at the Open Assembly

Health and food Issues

A fair amount of time was devoted during our breakout session to the discussion of health and food issues related to the presentations touching on food supplies for Native people (Larry Weiss) and Russell Fielding's discussion of alternatives to whale meat and blubber for people living on the Faeroe Islands. During our conversation regarding pilot waling in the Faeroe Islands, a participant mentioned that in Alaska eliminating whaling would not be acceptable because it is such an integral part of life for Native people; eliminating whaling would have a negative impact on Native communities and cultures. Furthermore, there are consequences when people change from a substance diet to modern Western diets. For example, health plummets due to the increase in unhealthy processed and replacement foods. Also discussed was the need in the Arctic to explore food alternatives, especially in the context of climate change. For example, it might be possible in Arctic communities for people to grow their own food in greenhouses rather than relying on imported foods. Several breakout participants mentioned that there have been successful attempts in Arctic communities with growing food in local greenhouses. Greenland was mentioned as an example, where there is an effort to increase production of potatoes and other vegetables to supplement the diet. Apparently in the eastern

Arctic people are beginning to utilize greenhouses to grow their own food which is resulting in better quality produce and more choices for types of produce that people choose to consume. We agreed that greenhouses and gardening in Arctic communities is a sound idea and should be further explored.

Traditional and Modern Knowledge

There was a lengthy discussion regarding traditional and modern knowledge. Participants felt that there is a need to integrate traditional and modern knowledge in science. There is a misperception that traditional knowledge is only relevant to those living in traditional communities which leads to a lack of understanding in modern knowledge. More than one participant noted that balance is needed between traditional and modern knowledge. During this discussion, someone posed the question, “what are the possible best scenarios for integrating traditional and modern knowledge in science?”. Several participants mentioned groups of researchers who are integrating traditional and modern knowledge. For example, the Young Researchers at NRF are integrating traditional knowledge into their research. It was also noted that in Alaska there has been a long standing relationship between the Arctic community and the research community and that the inclusion of all knowledge systems is critical as we engage in conversations about issues impacting the Arctic nations. It was pointed out that one of the misinterpretations of traditional knowledge is that it is not dynamic, but remains static. It is important to understand that traditional knowledge is a dynamic knowledge system that builds on its ages. The discussion of using traditional and modern knowledge went beyond the use of science. One participant mentioned that local and traditional knowledge should be used in local decision making and that decision making should be based on sound science that includes traditional knowledge. Participants felt that we need to be careful with the potential exploitation of traditional knowledge. It was pointed out that traditional knowledge has been used to discredit climate change in Canada. Related to the discussion regarding the use of traditional knowledge in policy decisions, a participant mentioned the problem of communication from the Arctic to the South. A participant noted, “there is something wrong with the way the North and the South communicate and we should look at the Arctic Council [to increase communication]”.

The Arctic Council as a Platform

Finally, participants began a discussion regarding how the Arctic Council could play a role in forwarding ideas raised here at the NRF Open Assembly. For example, the use of traditional knowledge in modern science should be discussed in an open forum at the Arctic Council and that in the Arctic Council we need to have more room for discussion between the Member States and the Observers. A participant explained that within the Arctic Council, the idea has been moved forward to have separate conferences in order to have a dialogue and to bring cross-cutting theme groups together. It was also noted that the Arctic Council should be sent the breakout session reports from the NRF. Participants raised the question, “how could the Arctic Council play a role in forwarding ideas raised here at the NRF”?