

## **Breakout session**

Group 1, Wednesday, September 24, 2008

Rapporteur: Shirley Roburn

Although most of the discussion focused on outreach and education strategies for the Arctic Council's work, the group began by clarifying more general questions concerning the Arctic Council and its role.

### **General Discussion of the Arctic Council and its mandate**

The group began by reviewing what issues fit within the mandate of the Arctic Council, and raised questions regarding the Council's scope. For example, there was discussion as to whether the research scope of the Council's activities should be narrowed to focus on assessment or "state of the arctic" reports, given that there are other disciplinary groups for most social and physical sciences. Other people highlighted the benefits of mutlidisciplinary approaches, which are more holistic and can bring specific new insights.

The group also questioned some of the limitations facing the Arctic Council as a multilateral body, questioning whether the Council was evolving sufficiently to meet evolving needs. Some people voiced concerns about issues of fragmentation and exclusion in northern multilateral governance in general. An example of this problem is the gulf that sometimes arises between the national policies of individual member countries, and the joint policies that members of the Council have all signed on to. Other examples of "disconnects" included policy differences between indigenous peoples and the national governments of the states they live within, and lack of understanding or connection between governments and the various projects of the International Polar Year.

## **The low profile of the Arctic Council**

The general impression of the group was that the Arctic Council's profile is low, even among groups for whom the Arctic Council's work has immediate applications. It was discussed whether national level representatives at the Arctic Council could do more to bring their work back to their individual countries. Canada has put forward an outreach and communication strategy for the Arctic Council, and this is starting discussion on how outreach is best done. The more general question was raised as to whether the Arctic Council was itself best positioned to engage in outreach, or whether this approach was too 'top down'. When the Arctic Council released particularly crucial reports on human development and climate change, the NRF held 'town hall' style meetings: perhaps partnerships and other types of community links are necessary to complete the 'loop' between the Council and constituents in member states.

## **Community Level Outreach**

The group briefly considered whether different types of outreach materials, such as DVDs, could be helpful. One example that was discussed was the DVD distributed in support of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment findings. Another approach that was mentioned was the type of long-term, community-initiated education epitomized by the Yukon community stewards program. This program funded extended placements of fish and wildlife resource people in small communities, where they supported community environmental education and monitoring projects. Later on in the discussion, the idea of involving communities in monitoring came up as a very practical way to bridge gaps between scientific research and its applied social relevance. Certain arctic observation networks are already in place which draw on local community participation--such networks are critical for effective, long-term monitoring, whether in the social or 'hard' sciences. In either case, longer time spans make it more possible to meaningfully study 'change'. Community involvement 'closes the loop', making for a better two way flow of information: where communities are involved in gathering data, they are also more likely to have results flow back to them.

## **Scientific Information: the balance between specificity and synthesis**

The group discussed the difficulty in balancing the production of cutting-edge research with the need to actually synthesize and incorporate scientific information so it becomes part of our broader understanding. Andrew Weaver's theories were cited to elaborate-- Weaver has written about how too much emphasis on peer-reviewed scientific data can cause practitioners to focus on producing scientific papers to the point where they do not spend enough time contextualizing their data, and linking it up to related real-world contexts. While any effort to synthesize information inevitably involves bias, the group discussed the need for dialog among different groups of academic researchers, and between researchers and society more broadly. The International Polar Year was mentioned as one effort to create a more complete research picture, which is more interdisciplinary and involves more "team" science. Additionally, some IPY projects focus on practical issues--which is one good way to create strong collaborations and ensure a good flow of communication between researchers and others who have an interest in the research outcomes.

Both synthesis and specificity are needed for research to advance: very specific expertise is required to bring something new to a research question, but a 'big picture' mindset is also needed to contextualize the results and to put them in dialog with other knowledge.

The group discussed the difficulty of creating such dialogs: it is not always a simple matter to determine when more data is needed, or when what is actually required is to better understand the existing pieces of information and how they are linked. To create dialog, one must disseminate information, but until one has a handle on the 'global' picture and can evaluate what information is important to share, it's hard to know what to disseminate and therefore how to start productive dialog. Synthesis is always a subjective process; however, rather than avoiding this process, more people should be engaging in it more often, creating a diversity of "big pictures" that help to conceptualize the whole from different perspectives.

In addition to the question of how knowledge can bridge different sectors, the group discussed the need for both "pure" research, or 'research for the sake of research'

where immediate applications may be unclear, and for research that asks socially relevant questions. In general, it was felt that academics should give more emphasis/higher priority to pursuing socially relevant research areas; at the same time it was recognized that knowledge often develops in unpredictable ways, and that open-minded exploration--including of the seemingly esoteric--is an essential part of knowledge creation.

### **A Few Practical Proposals**

Some practical projects are already underway to improve access to the Arctic Council. For example, a new Arctic Portal web tool will provide a gateway to much "public" Arctic Council information.

The group felt that the most important thing at this juncture is not that more people know about the Arctic Council itself, but that the knowledge and policy proposals that are generated within the individual Arctic Council working groups find their way to people for whom the information is relevant. With that in mind, the group discussed how at the working group level a lot of exchange is already taking place, with practitioners who sit on the various working groups bringing knowledge back to their home countries and home governments. The group discussed avenues for increasing funding for working group members, and particularly for representatives of Permanent Participants. Such representatives have close links with Arctic peoples who may be most affected by the issues confronted by the working groups--at the same time, the Permanent Participants have substantively fewer financial resources than nation-state actors, and this poses a limit to participation. Travel costs to and from meetings are an important impediment. It was brought up that a similar lack of resources posed a hurdle for the University of the Arctic, which found it hard to create continuity in its representation from Canadian First Nations because bodies like the CYFN (Council of Yukon First Nations) lacked the funding to consistently send the same staffperson to planning meetings.

It was suggested that working group funding for new research could be linked to funding support for permanent participants.