

Town Hall Meeting

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The Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR) and the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) were assessments and reports ordered by the Arctic Council. The Arctic Council is a tri-party partnership between national states, indigenous peoples' organisations and observers, many of them being research institutions. The AHDR and ACIA are examples of good collaboration between these three parties and integration of traditional knowledge and science made the final products better and more holistic. This is in line with the Indigenous peoples organisations, as research in the high north is not simply an amusing or challenging exercise – it is about our homelands.

The integration of traditional knowledge and science lead to new knowledge, and we saw examples on how to do it in the morning session today. The traditional knowledge is survival knowledge, which is developed by the people living in the region, and for the region. And it works - we have been living in the high north for at least 10,000 years, as in my region in Várjjat, east of Finnmark, Norway. The experience with AHDR and ACIA, with integrating traditional knowledge and science is valuable for the indigenous peoples' knowledge culture as it both strengthens our identity and self esteem as peoples holding a unique knowledge. The knowledge tends to stay where it is developed; it is the nature of knowledge. Therefore I think it is of utmost importance to support establishment of and build research institutions in the high north, among other things by using experiences from the AHDR and ACIA.

The Saami Communities use the AHDR in awareness raising. AHDR stated that peoples in the high north emphasise different values when defining the good life and it revealed huge gaps of knowledge about the life in the Arctic. Lack of statistical data on the Saami as a people and data concerning the Arctic is a challenge concerning decision making for our people. We see too

often that Saami regions come out worst in statistics, and through this become stigmatized. The AHDR helps the Saami community to define the need for developing Saami specific statistics.

ACIA emphasises the additional challenges we as indigenous peoples are facing in the Arctic. In particular the findings indicating that climate change threatens the livelihoods of indigenous peoples, being yet another stress factor of rapid changes our cultures are facing. The ACIA overview report is translated into Saami language. This has made it more interesting for our own institutions to use it and it has become more accessible for the public and raised more interest. It can be used in schools that are facing teaching material drain, in particular at the upper levels. At the same time the translation represents an important work of terminology development.

As a follow-up to the ACIA, Saami research institutions have developed a project called EALÁT (www.ealat.org). The project is a vulnerability study for the reindeer husbandry and aims to strengthen the livelihood as culture and way of life to be better prepared to face the projected climate changes.

Further, the 2007 Snowchange conference is a follow-up to the ACIA. It takes place in Sakha/Yakutia and is involving indigenous peoples' knowledge and observations..

Finally, I hope that the AHDR will also be translated into Saami language, and based on this we could also conduct town hall meetings in the Saami region.

Plenary Session II: Borders, Barriers, Interactive and Borderlands - Is north becoming a borderless space?

On Saami Council intervention:

The borders in the north are constructed by humans. We look very much forward to the possible development towards a borderless north – which would be welcomed as a normalization of the situation. The borders in the Fennoscandinavian region were established in the 18th and 19th century, and divided the Saami people into four different countries. Therefore the Saami Council made this Statement in 1986, and which very much is the driver of the Saami policies today:

“We Saami are one people, united in our own culture, language and history, living in areas which, since time immemorial and up to historical times, we alone inhabited and utilized.”

The division into different national states creates some challenges for us as a people: children have different frameworks in the kinder gardens and the curriculum in schools. These are set in the capitals, which are far apart from each other. The borders in some cases were set across reindeer grazing land and limited the migration with reindeer herds. Many of these challenges would be solved if the Nordic countries ratify the proposed Saami Convention, which among other things aims to ease and mainstream the Nordic policies concerning the Saami people in Sweden, Finland and Norway.