

Project Day Reports

Community Based Research

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The session, *Community-Based Research*, organized by Amy L. Wiita, University of Alaska Fairbanks, aimed to describe how community-based research is defined, envisioned, and implemented to reduce the borders and barriers between communities and institutions in the north. Seven academics-practitioners provided examples of community-based research, discussed the culture of research in the circumpolar north, and illustrated, using examples from their field-work, how community-based research can be used to promote a borderless north. Contributions by session members, who live or have lived in the circumpolar north, added balance to the presentations by academic-practitioners.

Amy Wiita, research consultant and doctoral student at University of Alaska Fairbanks, opened the session with a talk (drawing from her Northern Research Forum (NRF) position paper: *The Culture of Community-Based Research and a Borderless North*) on some of the basic concepts for working with people that are often overlooked by researchers. Amy emphasized that working with people is a 'relationship-building process,' and researchers must foster trust through mutual respect and honesty where the best interest of the community is always foremost. She stressed that education is a key to minimizing the barriers between a community's needs and research needs, and it is the responsibility of researchers to bridge this gap.

Davin Holen illustrated the importance of researcher-community relationships using examples from his long-term work with communities in Alaska as an anthropologist with Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence. He described the importance of engaging communities throughout the entire research process from research design (e.g. timing of the research) to the verification of results. Davin used examples from his work collecting subsistence harvesting data in communities in Alaska in which it was es-

sential for researchers to know the local context of the data in order to interpret it correctly.

Dr. Audrey Giles discussed the benefits of community-based research through a case study of water safety education in the Northwest Territories (NWT). In one case, a top-down water safety program that discouraged people from going near the water proved to be ineffective because it did not recognize the community's cultural and economic connection with the water. Dr. Giles encouraged research with communities that allows communities to generate the research questions and guide how research is conducted.

Tero Mustonen, researcher and Executive Secretary of the Snowchange Cooperative, expressed the need for researchers to decolonize themselves before working with indigenous communities to fully understand the cultural context in which they are working. Tero used the Igloodik Oral History Project and Snowchange Yakutia as examples of research which are aiding in the re-traditionalizing of northern communities. In these case studies, by engaging communities early in the research process, communities themselves identified what research questions were important beyond those selected a priori by researchers.

PhD. Candidate Scott Forest shared lessons from conducting participatory action research in northern Scandinavia. Scott discussed the dilemmas of community-based research including the debate over the validity of research that has social and scientific value but may not be welcomed by all community-members. Scott's ability to critique his experiences working with communities revealed strong lessons for improving community-based research and the importance of evaluating our research processes.

Dr. Oscar Kawagley, retired Associate Professor of Ed-

ucation spoke about his experience as an Yuiq from Alaska who left his community to pursue education in the south, and later returned to his native community as a researcher. Even as an indigenous person working in his own community, it took time to build trust between himself and the community. Dr. Kawagley described inconsistencies that sometimes exist between academic institutions and guidelines, and methods of research that are meaningful in a community. He emphasized the importance for researchers to try and understand their own culture and the biases that it teaches and encourages in order to better understand the cultural con-

text of the communities in which they work.

After six comprehensive and complementary talks, Dr. Susan Crate provided the session with closing remarks. Dr. Crate re-emphasized the importance of researchers really understanding the local context of their research and ensuring that local people know their rights in research. Trust, relationship-building, mutual respect and meaningful researcher-community partnerships are goals which researchers must continue to work towards.