

Governance, Resources and Co-management

Ivar Kristiansen,

Member of Parliament, Norway

Introduction

Let me start by thanking the community of Rae Edzo, the City of Yellowknife, the Government of the Northwest Territories and Aurora College for hosting this important meeting of the Northern Research Forum. I would also like to thank the organizers for having invited me to make some remarks on the issue of "Governance, Resources and Co-management". The paper presented by Stephanie Irlbacher Fox is interesting reading and helped me in forming my intervention.

As I was invited on short notice to this panel, allow me to limit myself to making some brief introductory remarks on:

- Firstly, some of the main challenges on governance in the northern areas of my country;
- Secondly, how the present Norwegian government is seeking to meet these challenges at the national level;
- Thirdly, how public and indigenous governments are organised in the northern counties, including of course the Sámi parliament;
- Lastly, how public and indigenous governments take part in regional and international cooperation on northern issues.

Challenges

Norway's sphere of interest borders with those of Russia, the USA, Canada, Sweden, Finland,

Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Thus, not only are the northern areas of great significance for Norway's economy, business sector and settlements patterns, they are also of great significance as an area of foreign policy co-operation.

The world becomes smaller. Issues related to local and national governance are closely - and becoming more so - connected to international and regional affairs. The northern region is no exception. The petroleum activity on the continental shelf in the North is but one example of an area where the boundary between national and international interests has been erased. Shipping transport, fisheries and nuclear issues are others. The demand for profitability, combined with the need to protect a vulnerable environment, means that new decision-making mechanisms are called for to allow all interested parties to be heard.

A white paper is now being prepared for the Norwegian parliament on how to develop a policy that better accounts for cross-border challenges; a policy of increased activity, greater openness and closer cooperation in the northern areas.

Over the last 20 years there has been a continuous debate in Norway concerning the rights of indigenous peoples; an issue that extends beyond national borders and is debated within the international fora as well. In my view, we should give high priority to indigenous rights within the foreign policy agenda. I will come back to the role of indigenous peoples shortly.

Before returning to the international and regional perspectives towards the end of my intervention, let me start by making some remarks on national and local governance; how the public government seeks to meet some of the challenges of our northern counties and peoples, at various levels.

Meeting the challenges at the national level

Traditional knowledge, minority languages, deep-rooted values and ideas; none will survive in the long run unless it is possible to make a living in the remote communities of the north. A lack of jobs is the number one concern in many of these societies and their success largely depends on the economic policies of national governments; their ability to develop favourable economic conditions and the right legal instruments; their willingness to introduce much needed incentives for small-scale businesses and empower regional and local authorities.

I believe that the present Norwegian government has taken some successful actions in this respect. The macro-economic policy has paved the way for low interest rates and a weak currency; a sound tax level has made further possible a boost of investments; an ambitious reform of rules and regulations has made it simpler to establish and run small scale enterprises. Moreover, the government has increased substantially the funding for new and innovative regional projects. Regional partnerships are established, involving county authorities, municipalities, the business sector, educational institutions and private organisations. The goal is to strengthen competitiveness, encourage novel approaches and prepare the ground for cross-sector initiatives with special attention being given to women and youth.

Overall, there has been a gradual shift of strategy in Norwegian regional development policy from “stability” to “mobility”; from measures preventing people from moving southwards to incentives that make people want to stay; from subsidises of unprofitable industries to investments in people, competence and creativity.

Public and indigenous governments - Counties and municipalities

The Arctic Norway consist of the three Northern counties of Norway with about 465,000 inhabitants, or about 10 % of Norway’s total population. It is 1/3 of Norway’s total area (excluding Svalbard) and a region where most of the indigenous Sámi people live. In the three counties there are 89 municipalities altogether, of a total of 434 municipalities in Norway and cooperation between the three is close. Municipal- and county elections are held every 4th year.

The region is well endowed with natural resources such as fish, minerals, hydropower, oil and gas. However, it is a challenge for us who live in the North to generate income and economic activity in the region and to prevent the income stream from going to the South.

The income level in Norway is quite fairly distributed, meaning that economic conditions for families in the North are equal to those for the families in the South. Of course, job opportunities are better in the Oslo area than in my region in the North.

Our Northern region elects 22 representatives to parliament, or 13% of its total and every government will have ministers from the Northern part of Norway.

The Sámi parliament

There is an ongoing debate in Norway on how we are going to organize management of land and resources in Finnmark County. Finnmark is one of 19 Counties in Norway and the most northern one. Today the Norwegian state owns 96% of the ground in Finnmark. The Norwegian government has proposed to establish a new body which is to govern Finnmark. The discussion is on how much power shall be given to Sámetinget, the Sámi parliament in Norway, within this new governing structure, and which matters the body shall decide upon. (The Sámi parliament was established in 1989 and has 39 members). The government bill is sent to the Standing Committee on Justice, and it looks as if it will be processed in the Norwegian parliament next spring.

As some of you may know “overgrazing” by reindeer has been and still is a big problem in Norway. There have been too many reindeers compared to the food available.

The cooperation between Norway, Sweden and Finland has not been as good as it could have been on this issue. The borders have, to a large extent, been closed between the three countries when it comes to reindeer herding. There are various reasons for this. The important thing is, however, that we will enhance our cooperation in the future.

One interesting process in this regard, is the working group which is making a draft for a Nordic Sámi Convention. It has come to my attention that this working group will put forward proposals on how to regulate a common governance of the Sámi territory in Finland, Sweden and Norway. This working group will present their proposal by the end of 2005, and I believe it will be interesting reading.

Svalbard

Svalbard is, according to the Svalbard treaty of 1920, a part of the Kingdom of Norway but special rules apply to the archipelago. All countries that have signed the Svalbard treaty have equal access to the area when it comes to economic activities. However, Norwegian laws and rules must be followed. For example, if a crime is committed in the Russian settlement Barentsburg, Norwegian police will handle the investigation. A governor (sysselmann) is appointed by the Norwegian government to govern Svalbard. His office is located in the Norwegian town Longyearbyen in Svalbard, a town of around 1500 inhabitants. For two years now the local community has elected a board that deals with local affairs. Earlier the town was to a large extent governed by the coal company, Store norske.

Regional and international co-operation

In the Northern part of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia there has been a rather close and fruitful cooperation since the year 1993. That year the Barents Euro-Arctic Council was established through a Norwegian initiative. The European commission is also a member with

both USA and Canada as observers. The Council consists of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and has its meeting every second year. Norway has the chair until autumn 2005.

A Barents regional council has been established under the Barents council, which fosters a good cooperation on a regional level. We have examples like telemedicine; using the hospital in Tromsø as a basis and then linking up video communication to Arkhangelsk and other places. There is very good people-to-people cooperation, not least in the field of education and representatives of the indigenous peoples (Sámi, Nenets, Vesps) also take part in this cooperation.

The close cooperation between the Northern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland within the Nordic Council preceded the Barents cooperation and gave it a flying start. It is of a very practical nature in the area of education and public services.

The most novel cooperation is within the Arctic Council and within the Arctic parliamentary committee. The Arctic Council was established in 1996, not least because of pressure from the parliamentarian side. In my view this is a unique form of cooperation where member states and indigenous peoples meet each other on equal footing. As you are probably aware of the Arctic parliamentary committee supported strongly the establishment of the Arctic university and initiated the project about Arctic Human Development Report which shall be presented at the next Arctic Council meeting in November. For the time being we are looking at the possibility of using IT in the high North for the benefit of all people living there, and we will put forward a proposal to the coming Arctic Council meeting.