

Commentary

The Arctic Human Development Report II: A Contribution to Arctic Policy Shaping

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This past year saw the publication of the second [Arctic Human Development Report](#), a decade after the first report was issued. If the first AHDR (2004) provided a baseline of human development, this second report enabled the beginning of temporal comparisons and contrasts across a decade of marked social, economic, cultural and environmental change in the North. Sub-titled “Regional Processes and Global Linkages,” AHDR-II attends to the challenges that globalization, along with climate change, poses to the socio-economic stability and human security of the Arctic population. Synthesizing the extensive literature produced over the past decade, authors also identified key gaps in knowledge that still need to be tackled, as well as important success stories over the past decade.

AHDR-II was written with certain audiences in mind. Directed at a broad audience, it nevertheless addresses, in particular: post-secondary students in, and interested in, the North; northern residents; decision- and policy-makers whose work affects the North; and the Arctic Council’s Sustainable Development Working Group (SWDG). Given the unanticipated interest and uptake by post-secondary institutions of the first AHDR as a teaching resource, this audience was very much at the forefront in the editors’ minds during the production of AHDR-II. The report covers a wide range of topics, documenting their diverse manifestations across the Circumpolar North, is up-to-date, is

rich in graphics and illustrative material, and is free to download, providing a valuable source for teaching and learning about the major trends in human development over the past decade in the North. In a more indirect, long-term sense, AHDR-II will hopefully play a role in shaping policy, as today's students become tomorrow's decision- and policy-makers. To develop policies and practices that will reduce vulnerabilities of northern residents in these times of rapid change and increased uncertainty, an understanding of trends in Arctic human development becomes a valuable tool.

In terms of directly addressing policy-makers, AHDR-II, like its predecessor, distills major findings and key policy-relevant conclusions, summarizes critical gaps in knowledge, and recommends priority activities that should be considered for follow-up work (AHDR-II 2014: 21-27; see also Larsen & Fondahl 2015). In doing so, the report provides a potential roadmap for the SDWG's consideration – a function the SDWG has recognized and anticipated. More broadly, in providing an assessment of key challenges to human development and identifying potential opportunities, the report will hopefully inform Arctic governance, both formal and informal, at all scales.

While informed decision-making and governance requires comprehensive and current information, of special note to the *Arctic Yearbook 2015* are the conclusions related specifically to the topic of 'governance' in the Arctic. AHDR-II attests that "recent institutional changes in the North have increased the local control and ownership of northern resources in some parts of the Arctic" and "an increasing trend of legitimate participation in Arctic decision-making and continued innovation in governance can be observed at all scales" (AHDR-II 2014: 23, 22). It notes, however, that increasing participation, and expanding demands for such, seriously stretch both human and fiscal resources, at all scales, perhaps especially among indigenous peoples. The report identifies the need to resolve such challenges. AHDR-II also identifies the need for improved knowledge on what institutions and institutional arrangements, formal and informal, will contribute to improving the human condition in the Arctic (25).

The report has been criticized for paying inadequate attention to the contested nature of governance processes and giving inadequate consideration of the role of non-state players such as energy companies in Arctic governance (Klick 2015). Certainly, such relations could be described and analyzed in greater detail, although the editors had to balance considerations of length against all-inclusive discussions.

The road to the AHDR-II's production was not without potholes. While the project was initially endorsed by the SDWG, the report did not receive its endorsement. During the SDWG review process, SDWG member states and Permanent Participants made numerous requests for changes to the text of various chapters (most notably the Legal Systems and Governance chapters), most to which the authors agreed. However, in a few cases, the requested changes in wording would have significantly altered the meaning in a way to which authors did not consent. This ultimately caused the SDWG members to fail to reach consensus on endorsing the report. A fundamental benefit resulting from this tension, however, was the identification of the need, at the outset of projects, for clearer understandings by all players regarding the level of academic freedom versus control over texts that a Working Group may exercise over reports, and what constitutes an internal versus external product.

If not formally endorsed at the Arctic Council Ministerial, the AHDR-II received mention in both the Senior Arctic Officials' Report to Ministers (AC SAO 2015: 37, 38) and in the Iqaluit Declaration itself (Arctic Council 2015: §19). A document offering key findings and suggestions for further research needs was prepared for the Ministerial and can be found on the SDWG's website (Larsen & Fondahl 2015). AHDR-II has been suggested as a key source for SDWG's Social, Economic and Cultural Expert Group, one mandate of which is to "undertake regular gap analyses to identify research priorities which will assist the SDWG in framing its human development research agenda" (SECEG Terms of Reference §III.c). Thus, AHDR-II is poised to inform the SDWG's priorities and workplan, and we anticipate that other Arctic policy-makers will find it both instructive and inspirational.

References

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