

## Briefing Note

# **The Arctic Resilience Action Framework: A New Paradigm for Regional Cooperation to Build Resilience**

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As the Arctic experiences increasingly rapid change, it is more important than ever to promote and support actions that enhance the resilience of the region. In May 2017, resilience was reaffirmed as a priority of the Arctic Council, and the Arctic Resilience Action Framework (ARAF) was adopted in the 2017 Fairbanks Ministerial Declaration by the eight Arctic Council States and six Permanent Participants.

The ARAF defines resilience as the ability of a system to bounce back and thrive during and after disturbances and shocks. It emphasizes the importance of considering linked social-ecological systems when developing strategies for resilience in the Arctic, where social and ecological systems are tightly linked. In addition to presenting a set of priorities for building resilience in the Arctic, the ARAF initiates a set of actions to enhance regional coordination and improve shared learning and the exchange of best practices (Arctic Resilience Action Framework, 2017).

### **A Brief History of Resilience in the Arctic Council**

The Arctic Council has cooperated on a number of environmental and social issues throughout its 20-year history. In 2004, the release of the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment (ACIA) increased our understanding of the rapid changes that were occurring in the Arctic (ACIA, 2005). Since then, the Arctic Council has continued to study the physical, ecological, and social changes that are impacting the Arctic.

During the Swedish Chairmanship of the Arctic Council (2011-2013), the concept of resilience became more prominent within the Arctic Council, primarily through the Arctic Resilience Report (ARR) project. The ARR, co-chaired by the United States and Sweden, and released in November 2016, presented a comprehensive, scientific assessment of resilience in the Arctic. It examined a number of “regime shifts”, or large, abrupt changes in social-ecological systems, and evaluated characteristics of resilient Arctic communities (Arctic Resilience Report, 2017).

Supporting Arctic resilience and adaptation was a priority of the U.S. Chairmanship (2015-2017). The Arctic Council led a number of initiatives to advance this priority, including the development of a strategy to prevent the introduction of invasive species in the Arctic, the promotion and expansion of the One Health approach, and the expansion of the Arctic Adaptation Exchange Portal, which was initiated during the Canadian Chairmanship (2013-2015) (U.S. Chairmanship of the Arctic Council, 2015).

As the Arctic Council continued to examine Arctic change, resilience, and climate change adaptation, it became evident that an organizing framework to improve coordination and enhance shared learning could benefit not just the Arctic Council, but a range of experts, stakeholders, and practitioners at multiple scales.

### **Development of the ARAF**

With the goal of exploring the way forward for resilience coordination in the Arctic, the Arctic Council Resilience Workshop was held in March, 2016 in Fairbanks, Alaska. More than 50 people participated, including representatives from six Member States, several Permanent Participant groups, and all six Arctic Council Working Groups. It was agreed that a framework to identify common priorities and encourage further action within the Arctic Council would be beneficial (Arctic Council Resilience Workshop Steering Committee, 2016). Following the Arctic Council Resilience Workshop, the Arctic Council Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) requested that a team of experts develop and propose a regional resilience framework (Summary report. (SAO plenary meeting. Fairbanks, Alaska. 16-17 March 2016, 2016).

Resilience experts representing Arctic Council States, Permanent Participants, Working Groups and Observers subsequently came together to lead the development of the Arctic Resilience Action Framework (ARAF). To identify the ARAF priorities, Arctic States, Permanent Participants, and several Observers provided input on their own resilience priorities and capabilities. Input from the six Permanent Participants was particularly crucial to ensure that the ARAF would be relevant to Indigenous communities on the ground. Ongoing Working Group initiatives that contribute to resilience-building were compiled to further inform priorities for the Arctic Council. The team of experts reviewed several recent Arctic assessments, such as the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment and the Arctic Human Development Report II. The ARAF was also developed with an eye towards global resilience initiatives, to ensure coherence and compatibility.

A draft of the ARAF was presented to the SAOs at their October, 2016 meeting in Portland, Maine (Summary report. SAO plenary meeting. Portland, Maine. October 2016). Additional feedback was subsequently incorporated, and a near-final draft was presented to the SAOs at their March 2017 meeting in Juneau, Alaska (Summary report. SAO plenary meeting. Juneau, Alaska. March 2017). A final draft was forwarded to the Arctic Council Ministers for their review and endorsement at the 10<sup>th</sup> Arctic Council Ministerial meeting on May 11, 2017 in Fairbanks, Alaska (Arctic Resilience Action Framework, 2017).

### **Arctic Resilience in the Global Context**

Increasing international cooperation on climate change and sustainable development challenges has provided a backdrop for the development of the ARAF. Global momentum for addressing climate change and other changes has increased over the past few years, as evidenced in part by the adoption, in 2015, of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development, and the Paris Climate Agreement. International and regional multi-lateral bodies around the world are developing adaptation and resilience strategies that complement these global agreements (Kofinas et al., 2016: 200-201).

A coordinated resilience framework for the Arctic, one of the most rapidly changing regions in the world, is an important and timely addition to the growing collection of existing regional strategies. With a successful history of regional collaboration on environmental, scientific, and social issues, the Arctic Council is well-positioned to lead this collaborative framework.

## **A Snapshot of the ARAF**

The ARAF is organized around four overarching priorities. They include the following:

1. Analyzing and Understanding Risk and Resilience in the Arctic
2. Building Resilience and Adaptation Capacity
3. Implementing Resilience with Policy, Planning and Cooperation
4. Encouraging Investment to Reduce Risk and Build Resilience

Each of the four priorities includes four to six “Action Areas”; or more specific areas of action where emphasis is needed. Arctic States, Permanent Participants, Observers, and others are addressing many of these Action Areas already. However, each of the Action Areas could benefit from additional work or investment.

By way of example, the ARAF suggests an “Implementing Action” for each Action Area in the document. An Implementing Action would consist of a specific program, project, or initiative that an Arctic Council State, Permanent Participant, Observer, Working Group, or other stakeholder would take that addresses the corresponding Action Area.

Taken together, the four priorities, the Action Areas, and the example Implementing Actions are intended to provide guidance for the Arctic Council and other Arctic Council stakeholders when considering resilient practices and investments. This framework, and the shared learning it represents, can guide Arctic communities allocating scarce resources, investors seeking to prioritize investments in Arctic resilience, and resilience experts seeking to leverage or replicate success.

Specific actions to address the four priorities and their Action Areas should be guided by the nine guiding principles outlined in the ARAF. These include, for example, valuing and drawing on Indigenous/Traditional Knowledge and local knowledge, empowering local communities, addressing multiple risks together and looking for co-benefits, and building upon existing global, regional and national strategies for sustainable development, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and disaster risk reduction (Arctic Resilience Action Framework, 2017).

## **Implementation**

The ARAF lays out several priorities for building resilience, but it also suggests additional follow-up actions to advance coordination and overall understanding of best practices. In particular, it proposes three implementation areas.

First, the ARAF suggests the collection and tracking of “Implementing Actions.” Each Arctic Council State, Permanent Participant, Observer, and Working Group will be invited to submit a

set of current Implementing Actions which address the four priorities and their Action Areas. To avoid duplication of effort, many Implementing Actions are expected to reflect existing commitments that have been made through national-level strategies, Working Group work plans, or commitments to through international agreements (e.g., the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development). Communities, academics, the private sector, and international organizations, among many other stakeholder groups, could also make very valuable contributions through the submission of Implementing Actions. Collecting Implementing Actions and making them publicly available will improve awareness of ongoing activities, encourage additional circumpolar collaboration and partnerships, and stimulate new, innovative ways of thinking.

The second area of implementation is an inventory of existing and emerging measurement protocols and indicators to help measure progress towards building resilience. Developing this inventory is a first step to informing ways to measure progress towards building resilience at a circumpolar level. However, such an inventory could also be useful at the national, subnational, or community level.

Finally, an important goal of the ARAF is the promotion of shared learning and exchange of best practices. To facilitate this exchange, the ARAF proposes the establishment of a biennial resilience forum, which will convene local, sub-regional, and regional resilience experts and practitioners. The forum will be an opportunity to assess collective progress towards the ARAF priorities, identify emerging priorities, exchange information, and showcase best practices. Finland will host the first Arctic Resilience Forum in 2018 (Arctic Resilience Action Framework, 2017).

### **ARAF Adoption by the Arctic Council**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Arctic Council Ministerial meeting was held on May 11, 2017 in Fairbanks, Alaska. As part of the 2017 Fairbanks Declaration, the eight Arctic Council Ministers and representatives of the six Permanent Participants agreed to “*adopt* the Arctic Resilience Action Framework to track suggested circumpolar resilience priorities and to coordinate such efforts, and *welcome* actions as appropriate to address those priorities” (Fairbanks Declaration, 2017).

The SAO Report to Ministers provides further guidance for implementing the ARAF. It states that the ARAF implementation will occur under the leadership of the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG), with input from the five other Arctic Council Working Groups. It also directs the Arctic Council Secretariat to provide support for the implementation activities of the ARAF (Senior Arctic Officials’ Report to Ministers, 2017).

Building on the three implementation areas proposed by the ARAF, the SAO Report to Ministers directs the Arctic States, PPs, and Working Groups to share actions that they are taking to build resilience. It also states that a team of experts will identify opportunities to measure and evaluate progress, and it states that Finland will host the first biennial Arctic Resilience forum in 2018. Finally, it states that efforts to implement the ARAF will be reviewed by SAOs after two years (SAO Report to Ministers, 2017).

### **Next Steps**

The first phase of ARAF implementation will be led by the United States, Sweden, and Finland. By Fall 2017, it is expected that a project team, consisting of representatives from other Arctic States, Permanent Participants and Observers, will be formed under the SDWG. The project team

will lead a process, with support from the Arctic Council Secretariat, to collect Implementing Actions from Arctic Council States, Permanent Participants, Working Groups, and Observers. The project team will also consider ways to engage other non-Arctic Council stakeholders that are undertaking important initiatives that address the ARAF priorities.

In addition, the project team will begin the inventory of monitoring protocols and indicators. It will also provide guidance for organizing the September 2018 forum.

## Conclusion

The ARAF provides an important opportunity to enhance cooperation and learning and to systematically and strategically build Arctic resilience. In a region that is changing more rapidly than almost anywhere else on the planet, the ARAF also provides an important opportunity for the Arctic Council to demonstrate regional and global leadership. Remarkably, the ARAF has already brought together all Arctic Council States, Permanent Participants, and Working Groups to discuss this high-priority and cross-cutting issue. The first two years of ARAF implementation will provide abundant lessons and insights for how the Arctic Council can more effectively collaborate to address resilience, and similar urgent and cross-cutting issues.

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