

Briefing Note

Arctic Expert-to-Expert Initiative for Continuous Scientific and Indigenous Knowledge Exchange in the Arctic

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Introduction

Scientific cooperation in the Arctic has witnessed an uninterrupted period of nearly 30 years of peace and mutual understanding among diverse actors, states, and international bodies. The situation changed dramatically post-February 2022, which resulted in the suspension of the work of the Arctic Council and many other fora and organizations working on the pan-Arctic scale. The pause of work of the Arctic Council can be regarded as the most significant one as it facilitated the exchange of knowledge and scientific collaboration, and included Arctic Indigenous Peoples as Permanent Participants, meaning that the Indigenous Peoples had a direct channel of communication and knowledge exchange among themselves and all other Arctic stakeholders.

Formal resumption of the Arctic Council under the Norwegian Chairship since Summer-Fall 2023 presents a tiny light of hope. Yet, by the time of writing it is still unclear how the Councils' practical work at the project level is going to proceed.

Challenges in scientific and Indigenous knowledge exchange in the Arctic

The Arctic region, characterized by its remote location and harsh climate, presents significant challenges for data collection. Interruptions in scientific collaborations have resulted in notable

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data gaps. The limited availability of comprehensive data hampers accurate predictions regarding the impact of climate change globally. In addition, the lack of data sharing on permafrost presents risks to the infrastructure and ecosystems in the region, as permafrost is a critical consideration.

Arctic Indigenous Peoples possess deep-rooted knowledge of the Arctic environment and its evolving nature, which can greatly inform decision-making processes. However, despite Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic holding a wealth of valuable knowledge, their insights remain underutilized in current scientific and policy practices. Regrettably, the interruption of work by the Arctic Council further exacerbated this issue, resulting in a stall in knowledge collection and exchange processes. This critical pause in the Council's activities has hindered the potential integration of Indigenous knowledge, impeding progress towards a more comprehensive understanding and effective management of the Arctic region and its complex dynamics.

Arctic Expert-to-Expert Initiative

Circumpolar scientific cooperation in the Arctic has become increasingly crucial in the face of the current geopolitical situation. Recognizing this, the Arctic expert-to-expert initiative emerged in fall 2022 with the aim of fostering continued dialogue and knowledge exchange among transdisciplinary Arctic experts and Indigenous Knowledge holders from all nations. The Arctic expert-to-expert initiative is a people-to-people, non-affiliated, bottom-up approach driven by scientists that promotes collaborative dialogue and knowledge exchange on climate change, sustainability, and other pressing issues in the Arctic. The Arctic expert-to-expert initiative is created in view of Open Science with global inclusion to address global challenges, involving people, each acting in their own capacity.

Emphasizing a people-to-people format while adhering to relevant regulations, this initiative promotes cross-disciplinary discussion on topics of mutual importance. Climate change and sustainability of Arctic regions and communities have emerged as key focal points, highlighting the urgent need to address these shared challenges through collaborative efforts and expertise.

The Arctic expert-to-expert initiative has a dedicated webpage on the Arctic Portal with announcements of current and future activities. The initiative is open to all scientists, Indigenous knowledge holders, and other stakeholders, regardless of their affiliation and nationality.

Arctic Expert-to Expert Initiative's Webinars

The first Expert-to-Expert initiative's webinar "Climate change and the Arctic: state of the art and what kind of scientific cooperation is most needed?" occurred on December 15, 2022. The webinar highlighted critical challenges faced by the Arctic scientific community, including data gaps, climate change impacts, and the importance of Indigenous knowledge. Insufficient data exchange and monitoring hinder effective management, while climate change continues to threaten the way of life for Indigenous peoples. The need for comprehensive monitoring, science diplomacy, and continued international cooperation has been emphasized for sustainable Arctic development. The webinar served as a productive platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration in addressing these pressing issues.

The second webinar "Arctic expert-to-expert cooperation for the future" event, held as part of the Nord University High North Dialogue 2023, took place on April 18th and was streamed online. The main message of the event was to emphasize the crucial need for Arctic expert-to-expert

cooperation in the face of the climate crisis and challenging geopolitical situations. The event aimed to highlight the responsibility of Arctic experts and scientists to foster continued dialogue and knowledge exchange among transdisciplinary experts from all nations. The focus was on addressing the impact of scientific research, identifying blind spots in Arctic scientific data, and exploring ways for the scientific community to collaborate inclusively on global questions using pan-Arctic approaches.

Ways forward

The initiative aims to draw attention and create awareness through its activities, including online expert webinars, exchange of knowledge and joint publications. By covering crucial topics related to climate change, sustainable development, Indigenous knowledge, and global Arctic scenarios, the initiative seeks to engage experts and participants worldwide. Through knowledge exchange, collaboration, and dissemination of scientific findings, the initiative aims to increase understanding and raise awareness about the challenges facing the Arctic region. By involving individuals in their respective capacities and promoting Open Science principles, the initiative strives to cultivate global inclusion and encourage collective action to address these pressing issues.

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