



Food and Agriculture
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Rome, Italy
23-24 September 2019

EXPERT SEMINAR ON Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous Peoples' Fisheries in the Arctic Region



TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' FISHERIES IN THE ARCTIC REGION

Note on Expert Seminar on Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous Peoples' Fisheries in the Arctic Region

1. Background

In October 2018, the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department received a request by the Finnish Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to organize and host an Expert Seminar on Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous Peoples' Fisheries in the Arctic Region. The Seminar should inter alia discuss the challenges of inter- and intra-generational Indigenous knowledge sharing in the context of globalization and a rapidly changing regional and global environment.

The Seminar will be jointly organized by the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, the FAO Indigenous Peoples Team (PSP), the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Finland, and the Government of Canada as a follow-up activity to the successful High-Level Expert Seminar on Indigenous Food Systems, held in Rome from 7 to 9 November 2018.

The Expert Seminar on Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous Peoples' Fisheries in the Arctic Region will bring together Indigenous experts, fishers, researchers and other stakeholders from the region to share perspectives and exchange experiences on traditional knowledge and Indigenous peoples' fisheries in the Arctic region. The anticipated outcomes of the Seminar include elements that could guide and support Indigenous peoples' fisheries policy, taking into consideration FAO's Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, which stress elements of food security, governance, management and interculturalism.

Strategically, the Expert Seminar on Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous Peoples' Fisheries in the Arctic Region will be anchored by the FAO Blue Growth Initiative, a major area of work for the Organization that aims to balance the sustainable management of aquatic resources with economic and social benefits for indigenous peoples.

Moreover, during the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages hosted by UNESCO, the richness of cultures, languages and Indigenous knowledge of Arctic Indigenous peoples and their fishing activities and concerns, will be reflected as part of the World's cultural heritage. This is particularly important given that Arctic Indigenous Peoples, due to impacts of climate change,



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geographic isolation and remoteness often go unnoticed and their presence is omitted within international policies, responses, events, meetings and discussions.

In addition, the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* affirms the distinct status and rights of Indigenous Peoples, including those within the circumpolar Arctic Region. The interrelated, interdependent and indivisible human rights to food and food security are central to the health and vitality of Arctic Indigenous Peoples and now even more so in the face of the dramatic and adverse impacts of climate change and impacts of globalization in the Arctic.

2. Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic

Indigenous Peoples have lived in the Arctic for thousands of years. They comprise more **than 40 different cultural groups of peoples**, including the Sami people in the circumpolar areas of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Northwest Russia, and Inuit in Chukotka (Russia), Alaska, Canada and Greenland. Other Indigenous groups native to the Arctic region include Nenets, Khanty and Evenks, among others.

Indigenous Peoples in the region are currently estimated to be 500 000, representing approximately 10% of the total population of the Arctic. Although in certain countries, Indigenous peoples generally represent a minority of the national population with the exception of Greenland, where Inuit are the majority. In Canada, Inuit and others constitute about half of the country's Arctic inhabitants.

Although there is great variation in the political, cultural, institutional and economic backgrounds of the Arctic Indigenous peoples, traditional practices, cultural heritage, value systems and spiritual beliefs are of vital importance for each community across the Arctic region.

Indigenous peoples are engaged in hunting, fishing and herding, and they are longstanding and important stewards of sustainable resource management practices. Indeed, they are the originators of sustainable development. Their sophisticated knowledge and the profound relationship they have to their lands, territories and resources are essential in the fight against poverty, hunger and malnutrition throughout the region.

Globalization and climate change constitute major challenges to Indigenous peoples and their way of life, which is anchored in their environment. Worldwide, ecosystems are increasingly under threat of degradation and unsustainable use. This situation directly affects the livelihoods, food security, and nutrition of Arctic Indigenous peoples.



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The survival and cultural integrity of Arctic Indigenous peoples as distinct peoples, as well as their individual and collective rights are constantly threatened and efforts to preserve and protect their way of life, heritage and ways of knowing must be supported by the international community.

Furthermore, national laws, policies and regulations often lack the necessary components to recognize and respect these distinct ways of life and to ensure that they are indeed aligned with the needs, views and rights of Indigenous peoples. In many cases, laws, policies and regulations have had the stifling effects due to a lack of consultation, discussion and understanding by outside policy makers of the status, rights, values, customs, needs and practices of Indigenous peoples.

In the case of Indigenous peoples' fisheries in the Arctic region, their livelihoods, safety nets and survival mechanisms are extremely well adapted to a harsh environment. Furthermore, the fact that they have survived for thousands of years confirms the adaptation, resilience, ingenuity and sustainability of their fishing, hunting, harvesting and herding techniques as well as their associated transformative activities as the original practitioners of sustainable living and development.

Despite their extraordinary knowledge, skills and adaptability, the solidity and health of Arctic Indigenous food systems, are now threatened by multiple forces, including the speed at which climate variability is occurring, as well as lack of respect for and recognition of the distinct ways of living of Arctic Indigenous peoples.

3. Objectives

To explore the topic of traditional knowledge, Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous Peoples' fisheries in the Arctic region in the context of climate change, sustainable management and governance of natural resources and to **adopt elements of traditional knowledge and Indigenous food security and systems into modern practices.**



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