

New Project: Arctic Social Indicators

By Joan Nymand Larsen

The Arctic Social Indicator (ASI) project – a follow-up to the Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR), and led by Joan Nymand Larsen, Stefansson Arctic Institute, and Peter Schweitzer, University of Alaska Fairbanks – is a new initiative with a goal to devise social indicators of human development in the Arctic. In March, 2006, ASI was welcomed as a new project by the Sustainable Development working Group (SDWG) of the Arctic Council at its meeting in Salekhard, Russia.

A meeting to discuss the concept and idea of Arctic social indicators and the feasibility of establishing an indicator working group took place at the International Conference on Arctic Research Planning (ICARP II) in Copenhagen in November 12, 2005. The outcome of this meeting, which included broad representation from the Arctic social science community, was the unanimous support for the importance and feasibility of an indicator working group. Subsequent to this, a secretariat was established at the Stefansson Arctic Institute in Akureyri, Iceland, and a working group was formed which over the next couple of years will be working on the task of constructing a set of clearly defined indicators suitable for measuring change in terms of human development in the Arctic region.

As follow-up to the AHDR, the goal of the ASI project is to devise a limited set of indicators that reflect key aspects of human development in the Arctic, that are tractable in terms of measurement, and that can be monitored over time at a reasonable cost in terms of labour and material resources. The AHDR, which was completed and launched in November 2004, offers a snapshot of the Arctic region at a particular point in time – the early years of the 21st century – and as such can be used as a baseline or a starting point from which to measure changes over time in the state of human development in the circumpolar world. The

AHDR, however, does not present a suite of quantifiable indicators suitable for use on the part of those seeking to monitor or track changes in human development in the Arctic. ASI will be working towards filling this gap. The ASI project will start out with an examination of fate control, cultural integrity, and contact with nature in order to determine whether we can create usable indicators of these facets of human development, and then move on to looking at indicators more broadly.

The first out of an estimated three workshops will take place in Akureyri, Iceland, in September 2006, involving approximately 25 participants. The goal is to have the set of indicators completed in time for presentation and discussion at the 2008 ICASS conference. The final report on Arctic social indicators will be directed at a broad audience, including the science community, inhabitants of the Arctic, policymakers at all levels, and the Arctic Council and its SDWG.

Funding for this project has been and will be received from the Nordic Council of Ministers' Arctic Cooperation Programme, the US National Science Foundation, the University of Alaska, and the Stefansson Arctic Institute.

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