

Presentation to the Last Ice Area workshop, Iqaluit, Nunavut, 6 June 2013
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As a member of the Greenlandic parliament, Inatsisartut, I work with our natural resources, our environment and our economy, from a political perspective. But I will begin in another field than politics, even though it is closely related. Before venturing into the darkness of politics, I worked as a psychologist. A psychologist is trained to analyze behavior. And when we have analyzed the behavior – we guess – on reasons for the behavior and the consequences of the behavior. Our aim is to try to help our clients avoid the most unpleasant consequences of their behavior. I find that politics in some ways are just “large scale psychology”: every day in politics we make “qualified guesses” about the future. We have to make decisions today, that will affect tomorrow, and we also need to take into account the role of our past – our history.

I've been asked to speak about potential managing options regarding the ice changes. But as I have listened to the different presenters I think we need to start another place. We need to specify to each other our aim, before we can venture into a partnership. Because I am not sure, that the different agents represented at this workshop, share the same goals and aims regarding the managing of ice changes. But we do have one important thing in common and that is the will to take action and begin a dialogue.

Someone yesterday mentioned that in order to make a successful collaboration between Inuits and others, there needs to be trust. And in this case the trust is not about trusting that the money provided for a given project goes into the right pockets or trusting that the research is valid or relevant. The trust that was referred to goes deeper and relates to our history as inuits. It is a history where our natural resources, has been given a higher value than the people. And it is a history where we have been outnumbered and out-manueverd when it comes to power, money and educational level – leaving us with skepticism towards groups that are interested in our region. WWF has 5 million supporters – in Greenland we are 55.000 people. It was mentioned yesterday, that the WWF offices working with Arctic issues include countries such as Russia, United States, Canada, Denmark and Sweden. All these countries have a history with conflicts of interest between indigenous groups and the governments. I am not saying these are bad countries. But I am saying, from a psychological point of view, that we cannot ignore the influence of the past, when taking action in the present. So we need to acknowledge that many inuits won't back a project if they don't feel trust or feel respected. My country is very big, but we are vulnerable and small as a people. And because of our history, Greenlandic politicians are far more worried about being accused for favoring big companies, organizations or powerful countries, than for being accused of anything else.

You need to understand this if you want to corporate with Greenland. We are in a process of nationbuilding, trying very hard to improve our living standards and the selfcontrol and selfrespect

of the people, so there is a lot of sensitivity when it comes to “outsiders” having an opinion of our nature, our resources and our governance.

But it can be done and it is also being done today. In Greenland a success story is about the MSC certification of our shrimps. In this case the government of Greenland and the fishing industry saw the potential and understood that this issue was not about making inuits catch less or earn less, but about securing a sustainable industry and make sure that we also provide for our grandchildren.

Yesterday Madeleine spoke about sustainable development – how we all want that. I agree completely. But I also find that Inuits and organizations like WWF have different understandings and hence different approaches when we discuss sustainable development. One of the reasons for this is probably a difference in how closely we are affected in our everyday life. Most people TALK about the arctic, while few people LIVE in it. I often talk to researchers and journalists, and it always surprises me how uninformed they are about the reality of the people. They may know a lot about ice or polarbears, and they may have talked to politicians, fishermen and hunters, and they may have an opinion on whether or not we should mine or drill for oil – but they have never met an unemployed person or talked to an inuit with addictions or a blue-collar worker getting paid very little for very hard work. So they are ignorant of the poverty of many of my fellow citizens, and the poor level of education, that is creating basis for social tension between those who have and those who have not. So when I talk about sustainable development, I talk about environmental sustainability, as well as cultural and economical sustainability.

So again I will make a reference to psychology. I got the thought, that what we really need is couples therapy. Most of the time couples therapy is about making two (or more) people listen to each other and understand that even though you say the same word, you might not have the same understanding of that word. So we need to find out if we are really are talking about the same thing. When WWF say they are committed to living in harmony with nature, I think most inuits can relate to that idea and that aim. But there might be a difference in the way we understand “living in harmony with nature”. Does that mean “conserving” nature or does it mean “adapting” to nature? And this will greatly affect our approach to managing the ice changes. It is my hope that both sides will be willing to listen to the other even though we might end up realizing that we will never agree completely. But that does not mean that we cannot have a fruitful relationship and cooperate on some valuable projects. And hopefully an organization such as WWF can use its power and its 5 million backers, to spread knowledge on the reality of the people of the arctic, as well as the polarbears of the Arctic. And also help people understand our more utilitarian approach to nature in the arctic. it is not a pretty photo opportunity for us, it is every day life and the place where we have to make a living.

I suggest that in order for this relationship between organizations and locals to be successful we need to broaden the framework. I have no brilliant plan for managing the last ice area, part of that

is really outside the power of my government. I could say: stop the excess consumption in the western world, but I doubt that will work. So we need organizations such as WWF to help us to get the world's attention to the climate changes. And I think it could be great, if organizations such as WWF broaden their scope, when it comes to funding research. I am not saying that research on microorganisms is not relevant or interesting. It is. But I also would like to see more research on culture and history. And that type of research is not as hot as climate change and therefore more difficult to fund. Would WWF consider supporting studies made by sociologists or other academics working with people and societies? Because I think that we need to understand the nature of people, as well as the nature of nature. If we really want to create motivation for change, politicians need to hear how the people is affected, and what consequences there might be for the society or even better, for the economy. I am very inspired by Bhutan and their approach to a green economy. I have tried to raise a debate in Greenland about how much money we need to fund our welfare. I question if we really need to exploit every option we have or can we make with less, for the sake of the environment and the culture. But this thought will not fare well if presented by an outsider. Again because of our history. For my part I will look on a common project with delight – seeing it as a possibility to bring the outside world to the far north and widen the understanding of the arctic in the world. Maybe we can start with a workshop like this, but with a focus on the people and the consequences for the people.

I have one final reference to psychology to make, before I wrap up. It is about the nature of conflicts. Differences of opinions are natural and absolutely essential to development. It takes bravery to go into a conflict, with an open attitude, prepared for listening and prepared for changing our own ways. Most people can't handle that. In many conflicts we choose to blame the other part, because it is too hard to accept our own part of the responsibility. So oftentimes we choose not to and take the other option> that is to be stubborn and wait until it is absolutely necessary that we change our ways. In our case, we might end up right there, because the ice is melting and our nature is changing. I hope we dare to be brave, and start the dialogue today instead of waiting for the point of no return and I hope we succeed to bridge the gaps there might be.