

The Arctic Circle Assembly – Report – Ramya Ramakrishnan

The Arctic Circle Assembly is held every year in Reykjavik, Iceland. It is the largest network of international cooperation in the Arctic on a wide range of topics including security, climate change, sustainable development, technology and indigenous rights. It brings together a diverse set of stakeholders – governments, international organizations, NGOs, academia, indigenous rights organizations and businesses. This year, the Arctic Circle Assembly was held from October 19th to October 21st at the Harpa Concert Hall, Reykjavik, Iceland.



Due to a bad weather conditions, my flight was delayed by 12 hours and I missed the first day of the conference and was only able to attend it on the 20th and 21st of October. The sessions I was most interested in pertained to indigenous rights and knowledge systems, and some sessions on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Attending this conference was an enriching experience. Although there is still a long way to go, the Arctic region has made significant strides in the inclusion of indigenous people of the region in decision-making. The first session I attended was Indigenous Knowledge Systems and International Fora: An Assessment of Progress, where representatives from the Inuit Circumpolar Council spoke about their advocacy efforts and the progress that has been made as a result. They mentioned that indigenous inputs were incorporated into the Central Arctic

Ocean Fisheries Agreement. They emphasized the importance of showing up, regardless of whether they understand the complexities of international negotiations or not.



This session introduced me to the work of the Inuit Circumpolar Council in relation to indigenous knowledge. In subsequent sessions I learnt more about their work. The Protocols for Ethical and Equitable Engagement, for instance, lay out directives for governments, NGOs and any other organizations engaging with the Inuit on how they can do so ethically. There were also sessions that provided various instances of the use of indigenous knowledge in Arctic monitoring. In the session on Arctic Marine Biodiversity and Conservation Measures, the representative of the Centre for Arctic Flora and Fauna talked about how the stomach contents of a walrus are linked to sea ice thickness and water currents, connections that exist in indigenous knowledge, of which external researchers are unaware. Similar observations were made during the session Strategies for Arctic Observations: Empowering Indigenous and Local Perspectives, organized by the ROADS Advisory Panel of the Sustaining Arctic Observation Networks (SAON) in which the panelists discussed at length the development of Shared Arctic Variables for the observation of the Arctic along with indigenous knowledge holders.



I gained a lot from attending the conference. Since I had a specific focus area, I curated my sessions in a way that I learnt in depth about it. I also networked with panelists from these sessions and have reached out to them after. Attending this conference directly contributed to my capstone idea, which is to develop a framework for incorporating indigenous knowledge into monitoring and evaluation frameworks, taking the Arctic as a case study.

