Sustainable Development Working Group
The Human Face of the Arctic
Strategic Framework 2017
Preface

This Strategic Framework of the Arctic Council’s Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) is the result of collaborative scoping efforts spanning a number of Arctic Council Chairmanships and, during 2015-17, an extensive drafting and review process involving all eight Arctic Council States and six Permanent Participant organizations. The Strategic Framework was approved by the Arctic Council’s Senior Arctic Officials (SAOs) in March, 2017.

The Framework constitutes the context in which the SDWG’s activities will be conducted over the period 2017-2030. It provides the SDWG with a Strategic Vision statement and an Implementation Plan that frame the working group’s activities with respect to: priority and project areas; guiding principles; stakeholder engagement; as well as outlines current and emerging challenges and opportunities for the SDWG. The Strategic Framework will be updated as and when necessary to reflect the decisions of the Arctic Council Ministers, who determine the SDWG mandate.

Further details on the implementation of the Strategic Framework can be found within the SDWG’s Work Plans, which are updated bi-annually. Please visit www.sdwg.org for the latest version.

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Part One: Strategic Vision

1. Context

The Arctic region is characterized by cultural diversity, differing socio-economic conditions, and unique climates as well as variable degrees of remoteness. Furthermore, the Arctic is experiencing environmental and climate change faster than any other part of the planet, creating both challenges and opportunities. To promote the sustainable development in this unique region, all Arctic States, Indigenous peoples, societies, and other stakeholders must act in a collaborative partnership that also draws on the regional and global efforts already underway.

Sustainable development for the Arctic region has been at the core of the Arctic Council since its establishment. The founding Ottawa Declaration (1996) commits the Arctic States “to sustainable development in the Arctic region, including economic and social development, improved health conditions and cultural well-being” and “to the protection of the Arctic environment, including the health of Arctic ecosystems, maintenance of biodiversity in the Arctic region and conservation and sustainable use of natural resources”.

Expanding on this mandate, the Arctic Council developed the Arctic Council Terms of Reference for a Sustainable Development Program (1998) and established the SDWG at the Arctic Council Ministerial in Iqaluit in September, 1998. Through the concrete projects and activities of the SDWG, cross-cutting efforts with other Working Groups, and updated strategic frameworks such as the Barrow Sustainable Development Framework Document (2000), the Arctic Council has continuously built on its core objective of achieving sustainable development for the Arctic region.

In keeping with this objective, the SDWG is mandated to propose and adopt steps to be taken by the Arctic States to advance sustainable development in the Arctic. This includes pursuing opportunities to protect and enhance the environment and the economies, culture and health of Indigenous communities and of other inhabitants of the Arctic, as well as to improve the environmental, economic and social conditions of Arctic communities as a whole.
Building self-sufficient, resilient, and healthy Arctic communities for present and future generations, while protecting the environment and means of subsistence and creating conditions for the preservation and development of cultural traditions, will continue to be a primary goal of the SDWG. The SDWG focuses on initiatives that provide practical knowledge and contribute to capacity building of Indigenous peoples and Arctic communities to respond to local, regional and global challenges and opportunities.

2. Vision
The SDWG strives to be a leading force for sustainable development in the Arctic. Through its regional leadership, it contributes to global sustainable development efforts such as the UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts such as the Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (2015). The adoption of Agenda 2030 in particular provides new momentum to enhance sustainable development activities relevant to the Arctic and resonates with the past, present and future work of the SDWG.

Sustainable development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. As such, this principle calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and the planet.

For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonize three core elements or pillars in an integrated way: social equity, economic development and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected and are crucial for the well-being of individuals and societies. In addition to being at the center of the work of the SDWG, sustainable development is also a cross-cutting concept that runs through the work of the Arctic Council, its working groups and task forces.
Sustainable development must be based on best available knowledge, which includes knowledge derived from scientific data, Indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge and local knowledge. Through innovative approaches, the SDWG will contribute to an Arctic with expanded economic activities capable of producing wealth for the people who make the region their home now and in the future, while supporting their well-being, promoting their cultures, and safeguarding their environment.

The SDWG is committed to engaging its experts and stakeholders, and to making best use of its project resources, so as to promote sustainable development in the Arctic.

The SDWG, by focusing on the human dimension in the Arctic Council, will promote the vibrancy of the region’s peoples, cultures, and values and strengthen the resilience, capacity and well-being of the Arctic’s richest resource, its people - in particular the Indigenous peoples who have lived in the Arctic since time immemorial, and the youth of the region.

The vision extends to 2030, a period which coincides with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This provides a unique opportunity for the SDWG to contribute to the implementation of the global sustainable development goals pertaining to the Arctic.
Part Two:

Implementation Plan

1. Implementing the SDWG Strategic Vision

To achieve the SDWG Strategic Vision, the SDWG will encourage the generation and acquisition of new knowledge; assess and monitor Arctic systems relevant to sustainable development and the human dimensions of the Arctic; encourage changes in thinking and innovative approaches to the unique challenges and opportunities emerging in the Arctic; and, where appropriate, make recommendations to SAOs and Ministers on sustainable development in the Arctic.

The SDWG focuses on the human dimension in the Arctic and promotes sustainable development with its three pillars in an integrated way.

To support social equity, the SDWG focuses on improving physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing, bettering understanding of the socio-economic conditions, protecting and promoting cultures, and strengthening the capacity of Indigenous peoples and other Arctic residents, particularly youth.

To support economic development, build capacity, diversify the economic base, and provide for greater prosperity of Indigenous peoples and other Arctic residents, the SDWG will work in an inclusive and participatory manner to advance the development of sustainable Arctic economies that will benefit Arctic peoples’ lives, to build self-sufficient, vibrant and healthy Arctic communities for present and future generations, while sustaining traditional ways of life. The SDWG favors activities that will result in direct, local economic benefits.

To support environmental protection, through the human dimension lens, the SDWG focuses on providing reliable and sufficient information on the status of, and threats to, the peoples of the Arctic as well as advising on actions to be taken to ensure that the air, lands, and waters of the circumpolar region are able to support future generations of Indigenous peoples and other Arctic residents.
Through its work, the SDWG will develop networks that strengthen the capacity of Arctic Indigenous peoples and Arctic communities as a whole. The aim is to provide decision-makers with knowledge-based information, derived from a combination of scientific data, Indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge and local knowledge and to provide this information through outreach and communication channels appropriate for its stakeholders. In addition, certain SDWG efforts will have strong, concrete community-level output. The linkages between SDWG’s vision for the Arctic region and the global set of 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), their sub-targets and indicators provides an opportunity for the work of the SDWG to contribute to the implementation of the Agenda 2030.

The SDWG will remain committed to its guiding principles and to balancing priorities across the three dimensions of sustainable development, recognizing the respective strengths and mandates of each Arctic Council working group and task force while also focusing on the added value that SDWG can deliver.

2. Priorities and Project Areas
The SDWG, through the lens of the human dimension, will encourage projects and initiatives that strengthen the resilience and well-being of the peoples of the Arctic and promote the three basic sustainable development pillars (social equity, economic development and environmental protection).

The SDWG will encourage culturally appropriate projects and activities (both independent and cross-cutting with other Arctic Council subsidiary bodies) in the following areas (listed alphabetically):

- **Community vitality**: increase foundational knowledge of human development and the indicators of community vitality and provide tools for constructive solutions to demographic challenges, patterns
of human settlement, urban planning and mobility. Promote the linkages between the protection of the environment and wellness, resilience and adaptability of communities.

- **Economic assessments:** strengthen analysis and joint monitoring of economic trends and activities in the Arctic, to include both cash and subsistence economies, to enhance sustainable and diverse economic development, investments and policies.

- **Educational opportunities:** develop circumpolar networks and harness innovative technologies to build knowledge and develop skills needed to maintain vibrant communities in a changing region.

- **Heritage and culture of Arctic communities:** deepen global understanding of the region’s peoples, cultures, traditional ways of life, languages and values and promote traditional and local knowledge. Sustain and celebrate Indigenous languages, traditional lifeways and practices, including knowledge about traditional diets and food security. Support the identification and promotion of heritage sites and areas of particular cultural significance in the Arctic.

- **Human health:** exchange information, assessments and innovations that can support public health systems and health service delivery (including clean energy sources/systems) - with particular emphasis on projects that reduce death and disability from environmental risk factors, suicide, and high-burden infectious and chronic diseases.

- **Infrastructure:** provide information to inform responsible and sustainable long-term investments in all forms of Arctic infrastructure while taking into account the present needs of communities as well as the changing environment through independent efforts and in coordination with other subsidiary bodies and task forces.
• **Reduction/elimination of inequalities**: strengthen and promote the adoption of sound policies for the elimination of inequalities based on age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status at all levels.

• **Science and research for sustainable development**: facilitate good use of the Arctic region’s research institutions and extensive intellectual resources to benefit sustainable development, including through academic exchanges and joint Arctic research.

• **Sustainable business involvement and development**: explore economic development, including in new and emerging sectors, and evaluate its potential benefits, including job creation and promotion of local culture and products. Highlight the sustainable development impacts of such sectors, create new frameworks and provide necessary support to all stakeholders in addressing the challenges and opportunities resulting from a larger and more diversified business presence in the region.

• **Sustainable energy**: promote responsible and sustainable management, use and development of energy and resources as well as innovative approaches encouraging renewable energy in even the most remote Arctic communities.

• **Transportation links**: promote the development of sustainable transportation infrastructure and traditional corridors that increase the capabilities for efficient movement of people and goods that have implications for Arctic communities, often in cooperation with other subsidiary bodies as mentioned below.

• **Water and sanitation services**: strengthen the participation of local communities in improving sustainable water, sanitation and waste disposal management with an eye to the unique engineering challenges and environmental risks that the region faces.
In addition, the SDWG will encourage collaboration with other Arctic Council working groups and subsidiary bodies by contributing to the human dimension of projects and initiatives that focus on, but are not limited to, the following:

1. **Climate change**: support cooperative circumpolar efforts in building community resilience and adaptive capacity.

2. **Protection and sustainable use of the Arctic marine environment**: address the sustainable development impacts of emerging Arctic shipping routes, promotion of traditional marine transportation, support of Indigenous marine management in the Arctic, water and ocean safety and human interaction with the global water cycle;

3. **Arctic environmental monitoring and assessments**: generate, promote and share of knowledge and data aimed at increased awareness of environmental and natural processes and prevention of natural and anthropogenic disasters;

4. **Protection of Arctic flora and fauna**: address the sustainable use and preservation of Arctic ecosystems and their role in human well-being and social and economic development, and the integration of traditional ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning and development processes.
3. Guiding Principles

In pursuit of its vision, the SDWG commits itself to the following principles in the execution of its priorities and projects:

- **Circumpolar cooperation:** The SDWG strongly encourages the active participation of all Arctic Member States, Permanent Participants, accredited Observers and invited experts in the activities and initiatives of the SDWG on common issues of sustainable development in the Arctic.

- **Concrete achievements:** The SDWG will focus on practical and innovative initiatives that lead to a direct and positive impact on Indigenous peoples and other Arctic residents, and should aim to increase capacity at all levels of society.

- **Collaboration:** To increase its effectiveness and efficiency, the SDWG seeks to leverage existing Arctic networks, complement the work being produced by other Arctic Council working groups as well as external organizations and encourage the use of its products in other circumpolar fora through the mutual exchange of knowledge, data and experiences.

- **Holistic stewardship:** In demonstrating stewardship in the Arctic, the SDWG recognizes the fundamental interconnectedness between the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development and will, based on the human dimension, incorporate this perspective into its work and its collaborations with other subsidiary bodies of the Arctic Council. The Working Group will support the responsible and respectful development of the region to ensure positive outcomes for Indigenous peoples and other Arctic residents.
• **Innovation:** The SDWG will promote the Arctic as a region of innovation and strive to provide new and creative solutions to challenges across the social, economic and environmental spheres of the unique Arctic region.

• **Integration of Indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge and local knowledge:** The SDWG will meaningfully incorporate Indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge and local knowledge into its structure and its initiatives, recognizing that this improves the global community’s understanding of the region and results in better outcomes. SDWG projects that include Indigenous peoples and other Arctic residents as respected experts are a critical link to successful interdisciplinary opportunities in Arctic research and to building knowledge and capacity among communities and research institutions alike.

• **Inclusive engagement and activity:** The SDWG strives to continue actively engaging, where appropriate, all relevant stakeholders at all stages of project development and dissemination in support of the goal of strong community-based elements in SDWG initiatives.

• **Public education and outreach:** The SDWG will promote both the awareness of the cultures, values and lifestyles of Indigenous peoples and other Arctic residents and of its work, as appropriate, to increase awareness of SDWG initiatives.

• **Responsiveness:** The Working Group will be systematic in its project management to ensure products and activities continue to be highly relevant to both current needs and future challenges. The SDWG will strike a balance between the flexibility to respond quickly to emerging issues and address Arctic Council priorities and the sustained rigor needed to manage its ongoing initiatives.
4. Stakeholders

The SDWG’s primary stakeholders are the governments of the eight Arctic Member States and the six Permanent Participants. The beneficiary stakeholders are the Arctic communities, comprised of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. To achieve its strategic vision, the SDWG collaborates with its own Expert Groups and with other Arctic Council working groups as well as with Arctic Council Observers and other stakeholders.

These collaborators include, but are not limited to: international organizations involved in sustainable development in the Arctic; the Arctic natural-science and social-science communities; academic, research and educational institutions; industry; nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); business; and media. While taking into account the clearly defined roles of each stakeholder, the SDWG will continue to create an environment of collaboration among all parties in the development, submission, review and support of SDWG activities.

• Arctic Council Member States

The SDWG proposes and adopts steps to be taken by the Arctic Council Member States, through its projects and accompanying recommendations, to advance sustainable development in the Arctic. SDWG Arctic Council Member States’ Heads of Delegation are appointed by their respective states to manage their interests in the Working Group. The Heads of Delegation are governmental representatives who act as a conduit into the various relevant ministries for consultation and involvement in SDWG activities. The Heads of Delegation guide and monitor SDWG activities in accordance with the decisions and instructions of the Senior Arctic Officials.

• Arctic Council Permanent Participants

SDWG Permanent Participants’ Heads of Delegation are appointed by their respective organizations to manage their respective interests in the Working Group and act as a conduit into their respective
communities for consultation and involvement in SDWG activities. It is essential to the success and the relevance of the Working Group to ensure that opportunities are created for the Permanent Participants and the communities they represent. Their views should be integrated into SDWG activities at all stages of project development, so that these groups are able to benefit from practical information and recommendations generated by SDWG projects. This may go above the standard offered to other stakeholders and often will involve ways of communicating that differ from other stakeholders. The SDWG acknowledges that active participation of, and full consultation with Permanent Participants, and through them, Arctic Indigenous peoples, is essential in addressing the challenges and opportunities emerging in the Arctic.

• SDWG Expert Groups

The SDWG accomplishes its aims and goals by prioritizing its activities, developing scopes of work, identifying expert groups to conduct activities and setting timelines for completion. The expert groups are comprised of selected representatives from each Arctic Member State and Permanent Participant with no restrictions on the number of specialists who may observe and be called on to provide the Expert Group with technical expertise. SDWG retains the option to review and confirm expert groups’ nominated experts biennially.

All expert groups work in strong mutual cooperation and participate in SDWG meetings. In case of cross-cutting issues (e.g. issues related to two or more expert groups), SDWG expert groups unite their efforts to ensure maximum synergy. In compliance with this Framework, the SDWG currently includes the following expert groups, though there is not a set limit on the number and specialization of expert groups in the SDWG:

In the areas of human health and social, economic and cultural issues, the SDWG has currently established the Arctic Human Health (AHHEG) and Social, Economic and Cultural Expert Groups.
(SECEG) respectively to provide guidance on circumpolar issues, help identify priorities and gaps in knowledge in these areas and create greater collaboration and synergies between SDWG and its stakeholders.

- **Arctic Council Working Groups and Other Subsidiary Bodies**
  The SDWG contributes to activities within Arctic Council priority areas being carried out by other working groups by bringing together the requisite expertise, often through its expert groups, on issues and activities within its mandate and cross-cutting thematic activities.

  Upon receiving or making a formal request to collaborate on a cross-cutting initiative, the SDWG will work to ensure communication and formalized cooperation among working groups at the early stages of project development. This is a necessary first step in ensuring that the appropriate expertise is identified and the human dimension is taken into account in the cross-cutting work of the Arctic Council in a timely manner.

- **Observers**
  Arctic Council Observers are encouraged to participate (as appropriate) in SDWG meetings and to contribute to the activities of the SDWG and its expert groups, in particular support for Permanent Participants and their contributions to SDWG projects. In this regard, towards sufficiently leveraging interest from Observers across all SDWG priority areas, the SDWG will, in a targeted manner and in alignment with the Arctic Council Observer manual and this Framework, facilitate cooperation and collaboration with Observers on SDWG activities.

- **Other Stakeholders**
  The SDWG will also continue to look for relevant and appropriate opportunities to collaborate with other external Arctic and non-Arctic bodies with interests in the region including, but not limited to: Arctic Indigenous/community organizations, including Arctic youth organizations; the Arctic natural and social science communities; academic, research, cultural and educational institutions; the private sector/industry and entities such as the
Arctic Economic Council; international and national business communities and corporations; and other national, international and nongovernmental organizations involved in sustainable development relevant to the Arctic.

5. Challenges and Opportunities

The Working Group is exposed to a constantly and rapidly changing operational environment. By addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities, the Working Group will increase its effectiveness and its commitment to its guiding principle of responsiveness.

Challenges:

1. **Prominence and understanding of the human dimension:** In the face of rapidly changing and competing priorities in the Arctic region, the SDWG faces a challenge in its efforts to foster a better understanding of the human dimensions of Arctic issues and to ensure this theme remains prominent across the work of the Arctic Council.

2. **Direct access to sustainable development expertise:** Sustainable development requires significant interdisciplinary expertise; the SDWG has created expert groups to meet some of these needs. Expert groups are a source of strength, but the Working Group must also find ways to best utilize and draw upon this in-house expertise as well as augment its focus as required.

3. **Economic diversification in the Arctic:** Global market fluctuations can jeopardize Arctic economies with limited diversification. The SDWG will seek innovative approaches to economic development that promote increased economic diversity.
Opportunities:

1. Increased awareness of the Arctic region and the Arctic Council: awareness of both the Arctic region and the Arctic Council has dramatically increased in the past decade, thus making it possible to convert this attention into greater resources and support for Arctic-focused sustainable development activities and initiatives.

2. Prominence and recognition of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: the SDWG will have continued opportunities to align itself with elements of these goals, targets and indicators, which could result in a broader base of support for its work for the sustainable development and human dimension within the Arctic Council.

3. Enhanced cooperation between working groups: the Working Group’s priority areas within Arctic sustainable development integrate all three sustainable development pillars and are therefore well-aligned for cross-cutting cooperation with other working groups.

4. Greater interregional cooperation in the Arctic: greater connectivity and new technologies are creating additional possibilities for cooperation in the Arctic. In collaboration with Observers, the SDWG promotes partnerships within and beyond the Arctic region.
6. Conclusion

The SDWG identifies, proposes and adopts steps to be taken by the Arctic Member States and Permanent Participants to advance sustainable development in the Arctic, including opportunities to protect and improve the state of the environment, and enhance the economies, cultures and health of Indigenous peoples and other Arctic residents, as well as to improve the environmental, economic and social conditions of Arctic communities as a whole.

The SDWG will, as required, conduct a periodic review of this Framework to ensure that it is practical and relevant in the service of the Arctic Council’s long-term strategic goals and the sustainable development policies of the Council as a whole.
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