

Climate change and Reindeer management

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The Sámi people are one people living in four countries - Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia - two of them being members of the European Union. The area where the Sámi live is within the Northern parts of Scandinavia and in the Kola Peninsula. This area is called SÁPMI. The Sámi populated the area long before the present states emerged. The Sámi is one of the last remaining indigenous people in Europe, giving them a special position within the European Union.

The Sámi have for thousands of years been living with the reindeer, that through the entire history has been the most important animal of prey. The reindeer wanders between different grazing areas, from the high mountains slopes in the summer down to the forests in the winter. The nomadic Sámi culture has developed according to the reindeer migration. Reindeer herding, although in modernised forms, is still the core of Sámi culture and the basis for then common rights that the Sámi have to their land.

The Sámi produce different products from the reindeer. Reindeer meat is among the best and healthiest meet you could eat. The good and healthy taste comes from the fact that the reindeers breed on natural pasture.

The Sámi must be granted access to forest lands for a roaming style of reindeer grazing. The forests must have a good supply of ground-growing lichens. The extent of available winter pasture determines the size of the reindeer herds. Without the possibility to graze on different kind of forest lands, the Sámi will face problems feeding the reindeer. For herding to continue as a practice, the Sámi need both winter and summer grazing lands.

The conflict of interest when it comes to land use is one of the greatest threatens to the Sámi culture and reindeer herding. During the past 30 years the Sámi have lost large areas of pastureland due to various kinds of economic interests. The Sami lifestyle is challenged by land exploitation such as forestry, damming, mining and road building.

Modern forestry has in particular made it more difficult for the Sámi to feed their reindeer during wintertime the natural way. Since the 1960's forest management practices consisting of clear-cut logging, monoculture plantations and other new techniques have been dominant. Soil management practices, common for plantations, destroy the layer of ground lichens significantly. Modern forestry has been an impoverishing factor for both reindeer grazing and biological diversity. Despite this, the Sámi are not trying to bring an end to forestry – they simply want to

be allowed the traditional right to reindeer grazing in the forest. We think that neither forestry nor reindeer herding can claim superior rights to the forests in northern Sweden and Finland. This calls for rules governing the co-existence and mutual respect is needed.

The situation is presently getting worse due to new national policy regarding increased levels of harvest. The conflicts of interest are not being handled. As an example Sweden and Finland have not ratified the ILO Convention No 169 regarding indigenous people. And now there is a new challenge when the weather is changing.

As in other parts of the world the indigenous people living closest to nature will notice and be victims of the changes in climate first. Reindeer herders are living very close to nature. During the last 20 years reindeer herders has noticed changes in the environment. The amount of snow and ice in the mountains during the summer is decreasing. The snow is melting and the trees and bushes are growing further up in the mountains. This will have direct effect on the reindeer management.

The two last winters have been very difficult for grazing. The temperature has been high and the wet weather led to an ice layer on the ground that made it impossible for the reindeer to reach the lichen on the ground. Reindeer were starving and the reindeer herders had to buy expensive food to the reindeer. If this is what the winters will be like in the future the reindeer management will probably disappear. The risks and costs will be too high.

A changed climate will probably lead to more industrial activities within the Arctic area. This will lead to an increasing conflict of interest. As the pressure on the reindeer management is hard already this will probably lead to great challenges for the Sámi. The professor of reindeer management Öje Danell has concluded that this is the greatest threaten to the reindeer management and the Sámi culture.

The loss of land has made it very difficult for the reindeer herders to respond to climate change. It is very difficult to adjust when the situation is already so complicated.

To prevent these effects the conflicts of interest must be handled both on a national level and on an international level. Policies need to be taken that makes it clear that other exploitations of land must be adjusted to the needs of the reindeer management and that they can not be allowed if they will threaten reindeer management. This is also the conclusion of a Swedish governmental assessment about the effects of climate change (SOU 2007:60). Sweden and Finland must proceed towards the goal of ratifying ILO Convention No. 169. It is also very important that Sámi and other indigenous people are part of the decision making process. To have hearings with the indigenous people is not enough.

To be a part of the European Union has in many ways been a challenge for such a small group of people with such a different lifestyle. The system does not take into account the Sámi way of living. For many Sámi it is not so obvious that Sápmi is a part of the European Union. The knowledge about the Sámis situation is very low within Sweden, Finland and the European Union. For small groups it is very difficult to work on a European level. Our organizations do not have the economic strength to be heard in Brussels. I am therefore very happy that I have the opportunity to participate in this interesting conference.