

# Effects of livelihood transformation on older persons in the Nordic Arctic: a gender-based analysis

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper addresses the transformation that has occurred in livelihoods in the Nordic Arctic, showing how it affects gender equality among the region's older people. The region's population includes the Sámi, an indigenous people, who have traditionally relied for their livelihood on activities such as reindeer herding, making handicrafts, farming, fishing, hunting, trapping and gathering. In recent years these have faced enormous challenges because of the rapid transformation of the region in the wake of climate change and globalisation. Overall, these and other processes have precipitated socio-economic, cultural, environmental and infrastructural changes that are transforming the local economies and severely impacting older people in particular. The main research question examined in this article is whether gender inequality has arisen among older people because of the ongoing transformation of livelihoods. To this end, the paper provides an empirical analysis based on experiences gathered from field studies conducted by the author in Finnish and Swedish Lapland. The research also presents the experiences of older persons in light of the standard set by General Recommendation 27 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which oversees the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The Recommendation sets out the right of older women to equality and non-discrimination. The findings of the present research contribute to filling a gap in the literature on the topic.

## Introduction

The Arctic is a peripheral region whose population includes a number of local and indigenous groups with distinctive cultural backgrounds. The Nordic Arctic is home to the Sámi, the European Union's only recognised indigenous people. The Sámi homeland, known as Sápmi, stretches across the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Russian Kola Peninsula. The region's inhabitants often assert that their environment is a dynamic one (Forbes 2010) that allows for changes in their livelihoods. This paper examines the impact of the continuing transformation of livelihoods in the Nordic Arctic on women in the area, referring to the age of 65 years and above older (WHO nd.). The specific focus is on gender equality in this population segment in Finnish and Swedish Lapland where fieldwork was conducted. The elderly population form a significant proportion of the region's population (Nordic Council of Ministers 2011: 40) and, with the exception of Norway, are also the fastest growing population segment (Mégret 2011; Nordic Council of Ministers 2011: 43). Older persons have already been seen as a demographic challenge throughout the Nordic Arctic (Nordic Council of Ministers 2009: 10; Nordic Council of Ministers 2011). Since the region is undergoing an extensive transformation in means of livelihood, among other areas, older persons are among those being impacted.

The traditional livelihoods in the Nordic Arctic include hunting, farming, fishing, gathering, trapping, handicrafts and reindeer herding. However, today the region faces sweeping changes in the range of livelihoods available, brought on by the advance of climate change, globalisation and industrialisation, the latter driven by an upsurge in mining and other activities of the extractive

industries. Modern occupations have emerged in the wake of these developments, but traditional livelihoods are being transformed and lost, with adverse impacts on the older population in particular threatening their social survival. In this article, reindeer herding is frequently referred to as a traditional livelihood. Even though reindeer herding is regarded as emblematic of Sámi culture, in Finland both Sámi and non-Sámi practice herding. In Sweden and Norway herding is limited to Sámi only. It is worth noting that reindeer herding as a traditional livelihood enjoys relatively strong protection in Norway since the country is party to ILO (International Labour Organization) Convention No 169 (ILO 1989), a legally binding instrument that deals specifically with the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples. At the time of writing, neither Finland nor Sweden is a party to the Convention.

The people who rely on traditional livelihoods are confronted with the adverse effects of the changes affecting the Nordic Arctic. Since those livelihoods have been predominantly connected to local activities, they constitute cultural practices that play an important role for communities in the region (Parkinson 2010: 10). The changed structure of livelihoods affects the entire population but older people in particular and the effects are both direct and indirect, include impacts on health and well-being as well as socio-cultural and economic security. Significantly, older women and men face different realities, with women becoming more vulnerable due to their different social roles in the community (Kukarenko 2011; Perbring 2009: 2). These roles depend not only on age and gender but on socio-economic class and occupation as well (Stott 2010: 159–160), with the poor members of each of the vulnerable social groups being particularly at risk. Older women in remote areas of the

region are considered the most vulnerable (Prior and others 2013; AHDR 2004). ‘Vulnerability’ is defined here as the degree to which people, their property, resources, systems, as well as their culture, economy, environment and social activities, are subject to risk. A lack of equality is one factor that increases vulnerability.

While the Nordic countries rank high in the global human development indicators of educational attainment, access to health care and gender equality (Hirschl 2011: 458), the Arctic areas of the countries have seen less progress. For instance, the elderly population of the region face hidden discrimination. It is with this in mind that General Recommendation (GR) 27 issued in 2010 by the committee overseeing the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which was adopted in 1979 and came into force on 3 September 1981 (United Nations 1979), henceforth referred to as ‘the Committee’ (United Nations 2010), is noteworthy. The convention, which currently has 187 states parties, is often referred to as the international bill of rights for women (Byrnes and Connors forthcoming). The instrument consists of 30 articles which safeguard women’s enjoyment of human rights and other fundamental practices leading to equal footing with men (Schöpp-Schilling 2004). The convention sets out and proceeds to prohibit forms of discrimination against women based on any distinction and exclusion that is made from a gender perspective. Article 21 of the convention empowers the Committee to make suggestions and general recommendations based on the examination of reports and information received from states parties.

In 2008, the Committee determined from the states parties’ reports that older women’s rights were not being properly addressed. According to the Committee, older women do not constitute a homogeneous group (United Nations 2010) and it was in this context that the Committee adopted GR 27 in 2010 to promote the protection of their human rights. GR 27 addresses a number of important issues, such as education, social pension, empowerment, housing, health and well-being, and inheritance. It presents an extensive and authoritative analysis of older women’s human rights with special reference to equality and non-discrimination. The Recommendation sets standards to promote elderly women’s rights. Since up to the time of writing state parties have not submitted any information concerning the implementation of GR 27, the Committee has not been able to examine the measures states parties may have adopted pursuant to GR 27.

‘Equality’ ensures non-discrimination, which means guaranteeing fair treatment for individuals or groups of individuals in response to specific needs. The term can be applied to characteristics such as race, gender, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation and age. In this paper the term is used with reference to older women in the Nordic Arctic, a region where equality means an equal distribution of power, care and influence. Older women in the region enjoy better protection in terms of their

rights if when compared with their peers in other regions of the world. However, in remote communities, because of a number of societal factors, elderly women are still vulnerable. The question this article seeks to answer is how equality and non-discrimination, as understood in GR 27, are perceived by older persons in the context of changing livelihoods.

This article consists of six sections. Section two, which follows, describes the transformation of livelihoods in Lapland. Section three presents the data collection and research processes. Drawing mainly on an analysis of interviews, section four then examines the effect of the transformation of livelihoods in the region on older persons. The focus in the section is on investigating the specific effects on older women. Section five proceeds to show the vulnerability of elderly women brought on by the transformation of livelihoods. With reference to the principles set out in GR 27 of the CEDAW, it argues that there are many ways in which equality can and should be promoted for older women in the Nordic Arctic. This finding is important as the literature has very few studies on the specific topic of older women’s rights although human rights standards in the Nordic countries are generally considered to be exemplary (Lopez-Claros and Zahidi 2005).

### **Livelihoods and the transformation of livelihoods in Lapland**

This section provides an overview of the concept of livelihood transformation and its importance in the context of Finnish and Swedish Lapland. Generally speaking, a ‘livelihood’ refers to the activities by which people make their living and pay for basic commodities going beyond income, which refers to money earned by a household and payments that can be valued at market prices (Ellis 1998). It has been argued that a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living (Chambers and Conway 1991). In Finnish and Swedish Lapland, the most traditional livelihood, in particular among the indigenous Sámi community, is reindeer herding, resembling its status in Norway (Josefsen 2010: 5). Both older men and older women are either directly or indirectly involved in reindeer herding. In the remote communities in most of the region, fishing, small-scale family forestry, agriculture, gathering of wild berries, especially cloudberries, and other natural products, as well as crafting traditional articles by hand, also constitute basic means of livelihood. Again, both men and women are involved in these activities as interviews by the author have shown (see below).

In the midst of the ongoing changes, reindeer herding has remained a unique economic and cultural emblem amongst the Sámi in the Nordic Arctic. Outside the region, reindeer herding and Sámi culture are often seen as inseparable despite the fact that only a small number of Sámi are engaged in the livelihood today

(Seurujärvi-Kari and others 1997: 18) and even then largely for traditional, environmental, cultural and political reasons (Thuen 2004: 87–108). Herding is particularly vital in the sense that the related knowledge is intact and transmitted from one generation to the next through the rich Sámi vocabulary on animals, landscape features and climatic conditions (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, the dynamics of socio-economic and technological changes have transformed herding practices. Among other factors, differences in reindeer-herding legislation between Finland and Sweden have played a part in this development: in Finland both Sámi and non-Sámi may engage in reindeer herding, whereas in Sweden only Sámi are entitled to do so. The old nomadic life style has been replaced by permanent settlement, and reindeer husbandry has become an industry (Hætta 1996: 48). Today modern techniques are used in reindeer herding. These rely on mechanised vehicles such as snowmobiles and in some cases even helicopters are used for herding and other work connected with the industry (Seurujärvi-Kari and others 1997: 19). The changes that have occurred represent an attempt to adapt the industry to the market economy. Marketing cooperatives have been formed, modern slaughterhouses built and reindeer products placed in shops for sale (Hætta 1996: 46). These developments have made herding an industry directed towards production for sale and economic profit (Hætta 1996: 48).

Even though the traditional means of livelihood are still important components of the economy of Sámi and other local communities (Seurujärvi-Kari and others 1997: 21), the population today is also engaged in a variety of other, less traditional occupations. With traditional activities now playing a smaller role in the economy at large, other modern income-generating activities, such as tourism, fill the gap. In fact, tourism seems particularly profitable in Nordic Arctic communities. Many families have built holiday villages or established campsites near their homes (Hansen 2010). In addition, they have leased land for commercial uses. Many local people are also employed in other parts of the labour market (Josefsen 2010), such as mining, forestry or other industries. Fewer women than men work on the labour market (Normann 2014). Although the relative proportions vary in the Nordic countries (Nordiskt Forum Malmö 2014: 6), women presumably have fewer opportunities to participate in such employment to begin with. They work at home instead, and receive a modest pension making them poorer and thus more vulnerable than men.

## Research and data collection processes

### Methodological Framework

The research approach applied in this article derives mainly from the ideas developed by Edward Cameron (2011), who stresses the ethical rather than the legal dimension of human rights precisely when referring to women at risk (including older people) due to climate change. The principle of equality and non-discrimination

is an established norm in human rights literature that promotes the expressions of social justice, values, ethics and beliefs (Freeman 2002), offering moral and ethical arguments for action (Mearns and Norton 2010). Since this research explores how change in the Arctic impacts the livelihoods of older women, the gender setting is presented with a focus on the ethical dimension of human rights more so than legal perspectives. GR 27 is the specific standard cited, as it calls for substantive equality and non-discrimination while addressing the human rights of older women. One other potentially relevant instrument is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948), which contains provisions applicable to the human rights of the elderly in general terms. Even though it provides no binding obligations upon states, many of its provisions were later incorporated into both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations 1966a; 1966b).

Data were collected through interviews conducted in several locations in Swedish and Finnish Lapland. The questions presented to informants were formulated on the basis of a review by the author of the literature related to Arctic change, including change in livelihoods, society, population and culture. The informants include not only older persons, but also researchers and a number of local people and professionals who provide services to promote northern culture and elderly well-being. The participants' consent to participate in the research was completely voluntary and they were competent to give consent.

Interviewees were selected using Kumar's well-known snowball sampling technique (Kumar 1996). The method relies on using participating informants to recruit future interviewees from among their acquaintances or networks. Using snowballing, information was collected about the informants from the network of researchers at the University of Lapland. In this 'interview society' (Silverman 1993: 3–32), researchers progressively create information by interviewing respondents (Holstein and Gubrium 1997). The interviews conducted can be described as qualitative research interviews, a type which consists of a dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewees that focuses on the topics of interest (Kvale 1996). Guides to interviewing were followed and the validity and reliability of the information that the informants provided critically evaluated (Gorden 1987).

### Field sites and applied method

Interviews were conducted in both Finnish and Swedish Lapland during field studies the author carried out in 2013 in Inari and surrounding areas in Finnish Lapland. The province of Lapland makes up the northernmost third of the country (about 90,000 km<sup>2</sup>). It is also a sparsely populated area with only 2.1 people/ km<sup>2</sup>. With a surface area of more than 17,000km<sup>2</sup>, Inari, where most of the interviews took place, is the largest municipality in Finland and lies within the area defined

as the Sámi homeland in the Finnish Act on the Sámi Parliament (Finland 1995: article 4). A year later, in 2014, the author conducted interviews in Swedish Lapland, in the village of Jokkmokk, which is also an area with a significant Sámi population. The name derives from the Sámi language, referring to the town's location close to a bend in the nearby river. With an area of 19,477 km<sup>2</sup>, the municipality is the second largest in size in Sweden (Hytönen 2001). The average population density in Jokkmokk is 0.3 people/ km<sup>2</sup> (Udén 2011: 290). Each year an event called *Jokkmokk Winter Market* is organised, which represents an unbroken tradition of more than 400 years. It is one of the most important social events for the Sámi people in Sápmi. On the first Thursday in February, thousands of people gather for concerts, exhibitions and trade that feature and embody Sámi culture. It reflects the importance of traditional livelihood activities, including reindeer herding, in promoting of Sámi culture.

The author interviewed 14 older persons in Finnish Lapland (nine women and five men from Ivalo and Inari) between 65 and 80 years of age, eight people from Sweden from several locations in Jokkmokk (six women and two men between 37 and 80 years of age), as well as researchers (two women and one man between 45 and 65 years of age) from each of the three Nordic countries who are involved in research on indigenous and elderly issues. In 2014, in Finnish Lapland the number of persons aged above 65 was 13,162 of which 6,486 were women. In Swedish Lapland the figure was 31,622 of which 15,698 were women (Statistics Finland 2015; Statistics Sweden 2015). The author furthermore interviewed three researchers from the Swedish Sámi community in Umeå (between December 2012 and September 2013). The names used in this article are not the interviewees' real names. The languages used in the interview were English (local people, researchers and two older adults) and Finnish (14 elderly people). Due to the author's lack of skills in the Swedish language, interview partners were limited to English speaking informants while translators were used where necessary.

The informants were asked open-ended questions. Kumar (1996) has asserted that open-ended questions give informants an opportunity to express their opinions freely, provide in-depth information and a variety of information. The questions pertained to informants' experiences of livelihoods, the importance of traditional activities, rights, equality, changes in livelihood practices and the impact of those changes on their social lives. The author talked with and asked questions of the older and local informants in two different settings: the informants' home, where they were interviewed individually, and elderly service institutions, where the respondents were interviewed in several groups. In the case of researchers, interviews were conducted in rooms close to workshop or conference venues. All discussions were recorded using a tape recorder and some were also summarised in notes.

Before conducting the interviews, in most of the cases permission from the informants was obtained by e-mail and telephone. In a few instances, a sample of the research questions was sent by e-mail. In all cases, permission was asked for again on site before starting the interviews. In addition, the author explained the aim of the interviews and the possible social benefit, such as knowledge production on the conditions of elderly people and dissemination thereof among policy-makers and other stakeholders, that the research could bring.

The analysis which follows focuses on informants' experiences of livelihood transformation in the Nordic Arctic and gender-specific perceptions of this development with special reference to the CEDAW's equality principles set out in GR 27. Taken together, 25 individuals, 14 from Finnish Lapland, 8 from Swedish Lapland and 3 researchers, were interviewed.

### **Interview analyses: how older persons in Lapland experience the transformation of livelihoods**

#### **Transformation of livelihoods in Lapland**

During the field studies, respondents shared their experiences of the changes that have been occurring in the region in recent decades and that have impacted the transformation of livelihoods. In their view, this transformation, which is connected to overall societal change, has caused both positive and negative effects, but the effect on older people has been comparatively negative. Moreover, the informants revealed that women and men have fared differently. The interviewees' responses were not connected to the research questions in a straightforward manner, but revealed a range of salient issues that merit analysis.

According to the respondents, most of the transformation that has occurred in the region stems from changes in living conditions. Almost all of the interviewees in both Inari and Jokkmokk agreed that despite the emergence of many new forms of livelihoods, reindeer herding and traditional handicrafts (*duodji*) remain very common means of livelihood for Sámi. Fishing, small-scale forestry by ordinary families, agriculture and gathering of wild berries and other natural products are also still common among the population at large, especially in the villages. Both the Sámi and non-Sámi populations in the region depend on these tradition-based activities not only for subsistence, but also as a basis for their cultural and social existence. However, some traditional practices, such as handicraft and reindeer herding, have had to adapt to new techniques and technologies. The respondents took the view that the use of modern equipment such as snowmobiles in reindeer herding is common today, an observation also supported by Pelto and Müller-Wille (1987). Indeed this has brought some positive developments in herding activities, such as herding activities being less time-consuming and with a higher degree of efficiency. On the other hand, herding has become more expensive, causing many to leave the profession.

The most frequently mentioned positive change caused by modernisation is that life has been made much easier. Advances noted include better housing, the availability of electricity and relief from traditional household chores brought by washing machines and dishwashers. Today, no hard work is needed to warm the house, housework can be done with little effort and more time can be allocated for making handicrafts and similar related activities. Development in the medical sector has also been positive. People live longer, treatment of illnesses has improved through access to better medical and healthcare services, and preventive medicines are more easily available than before. In addition, education has brought an awareness of infectious diseases. Furthermore, the state's social security and social service systems help mitigate economic and societal hardships. Some of the respondents, however, were of the view that the number of services should be increased, especially in light of outmigration of younger people and associated difficulties in establishing a solid network of care services.

In contrast to these positive changes, new economic activities, such as mining, prompted concerns from both the environmental and socio-cultural point of view. While there were mixed feelings amongst the interviewees about welcoming such new developments, most expressed concern over environmental degradation, which they felt would eventually contaminate fresh water supplies. The water of Lake Inari and the Lule river, for example, is very important for the daily life of the local communities. Moreover, mining may affect the reindeer herding culture as the grazing lands will shrink and herding areas will likely be dislocated. Some of the Sámi interviewees also expressed concern about losing their culture-based identity because of these developments. Tuula, involved in communal affairs and a Sámi herself, took the following view:

The mining boom that has started in Kittilä is located around 100 km from Inari, which will pollute the water of Lake Inari. People in Inari and Utsjoki [in northernmost Finland] rely on the water from the lake. Decision makers think that mining is important and water treatment will eventually solve the problem, whereas people in the community are concerned about environmental pollution. We are dependent on clean water, not on mines.

A similar view was expressed on the Swedish side. The expansion of mining in Swedish Lapland will have devastating effects on the Lule river, the water of which is important for many local communities. Most of the Sámi respondents viewed the contamination of the river as a threat to their survival.

Nevertheless, as mentioned before, there are mixed feelings amongst the informants when other issues are taken into account. For example, while talking about the *Beowulf Mining Company* in Kallak close to Jokkmokk, some clearly demonstrated their support for mining (Salo 2013). They pointed out that mining is expected to create

750 new jobs in what is an underdeveloped part of the country. Maud, a 73-year-old, non-Sámi woman who was born in Jokkmokk and lives there, expressed the following opinion:

We are only seven older people now living in this community, with no young people in this village. People are leaving the community because of the lack of jobs. I know that in the future mining will affect the Lule river and the environment of the area overall, which might result in relocation of the whole community, but I am concerned about the present situation. We need jobs to keep the young generation in the community.

### Older women's perceptions of livelihood transformation in their lives

Against the background of the above-mentioned developments, it is important to examine how the region's older women describe the meaning of livelihood transformation. In the Nordic Arctic, the nature of the traditional livelihoods historically provided different roles for men and women. For example, reindeer herding has traditionally been a male profession. However, in practice both men and women have been involved in actual herding activities even though women's role was not formally acknowledged. Matti, 78, a reindeer herder and fisherman living in Ivalo, noted that 'women's role was mostly that of helper in herding activities: they prepared food, took care of the children and handled the household chores.'

However, he added that in the summer time women, including his wife, were also fishing. Matti's view is also supported by Birgit, 76, from the Tärnaby area in Sweden. Birgit is a Sámi language teacher, and works to promote Sámi culture. She was brought up in a reindeer-herding family and studied at a boarding school for children of nomadic Sámi families. Such boarding schools comprised a special schooling system organised by the state where children attended school and lived in dormitories during the week. Birgit shared the experiences of her mother, who kept house while helping her father, who was a reindeer herder:

In customary Sámi practice, reindeer herding is considered to be difficult for women as a primary responsibility, as they must attend to the household and other responsibilities at the same time.

It is still the case that in remote communities women are engaged mostly in household activities, regardless of their age (Kuokkanen 2009). They take care of children and domestic animals, tend to household chores, make handicrafts, fish and help their husbands. Interestingly, it is suggested that in traditional livelihoods, such as reindeer herding, there is no set age limit. In all the Nordic countries, there are herders whose age is between 55 and 60 or above. As a result, herding is also regarded as an older person's profession. The decline of herding and the concomitant exclusion of older women from the profession as modern technology has taken over puts women at an economic disadvantage. At the same time,

they suffer from having a weaker position in society otherwise. Moreover, they cannot readily be engaged in new livelihoods, at least not as easily as men can. For older persons in communities in remote areas of Lapland, adapting to the changed circumstances is not as easy as it is for young people. For example, Minna, a woman working at a handicraft organisation in Jokkmokk, observed that older women are generally incapable of adapting or reluctant to adapt to modern ways of making *duodji* and are thus unable to compete with others in this sector. In addition, the loss of physical strength with age prevents them engaging in modern activities that industrial development offers. As a result, the household economy of older persons in general, and older women in particular, is unstable and even declining.

Significantly, women are becoming more and more educated in the region as elsewhere in the Nordic countries (Rasmussen 2007). They have strengthened their position in important sectors, where they are capable of influencing local and regional policies. When talking about women's position in her community, Minna very proudly observed: 'Sámi women are well-educated compared to Sámi men and even compared to Swedish women.'

When compared to young women, older women are not better off in the community. Generally, women are still subject to some hidden discrimination. Anna, a 75-year-old respondent, expressed the following view:

Since the '70s many changes have taken place that have made women's lives today more comfortable compared to what it was like in our time. Reindeer herding, fishing, forest work, daily household chores and caring for children were our traditional daily activities. We worked side by side with the men, who were highly regarded in the community. There were some unspoken inequalities which existed earlier, and which also exist today. Despite the progress that has occurred in recent years, you can still feel them.

Anna did not mention any example of the 'unspoken inequalities' in the past, but when asked did mention an example of inequality today. She noted that although women today work outside the home, in keeping with the nature of most modern livelihoods, it is primarily they who have to take care of themselves as well as their children and older persons at home. It is an unwritten, but continuous, responsibility for women, including older women. Thus, women have to bear too much responsibility, which sometimes seems to be unfair, unhealthy and unpleasant for them. Another respondent, Hannele (born in 1932), presented an example of inequality facing women, noting that although women have been, and still are, engaged in the market economy, in many cases their salary is smaller than that of men.

In the region, it is traditionally the family's older women who are most concerned about their family members' food and health and the maintenance of traditional rituals. They are still generally regarded as the holders of traditional customs and they feel responsible for passing

their culture on to their children and to the community at large. The transformation in livelihoods has given rise to new forms of cultural practices, once foreign to the community as a whole and affecting the region's cultural integrity. Such a transformation causes mental distress, especially to the region's older women as custodians of traditional culture. They feel threatened with losing their unique identity. This is most apparent amongst older Sámi women.

Birgit, an older Sámi woman mentioned above, presented the following view when talking about older women's equality, well-being and the protection of northern cultural identity:

To keep up respect for older people, cultural norms and issues of identity have to be promoted through different educational tools and training so that the younger generation learns about the distinctiveness of the concerns of the older people of the region. Local authorities should be strengthened, both economically and strategically, to ensure facilities providing safer, healthier and more environmentally sound living conditions for older persons.

While women generally seem to be very concerned about the negative effects of livelihood transformation in the region, even today their voices are often not acknowledged, especially in remote communities. In the case of mining, for example, women's concerns have been quite pronounced indeed. The author found that they are extremely aware of the consequences of potential mining activities for their health, land and overall environment. While talking about the operations of *Beowulf Mining Company* in Jokkmokk, most of the female respondents mentioned that mining would destroy their way of life. Yet, regrettably, in the process of consultation, and in decision-making, women's voices are not taken seriously (Nordiskt Forum Malmö 2014). Apparently, it is a family's male member who is considered to be the consent giver where necessary, even though in traditional communities, women, especially older women, have long been recognised as having the role of custodians of traditional knowledge regarding the environment and sustainability (UNPFII 2010).

Yet, the effects of the ongoing transformation vary within the region. One such effect is out-migration of the younger generation. Recent studies suggest that young people, including a significant proportion of women are leaving the north (Rasmussen 2009; Kelman and Næss 2013). In fact, the topic of out-migration figured prominently in the opinions provided by the respondents. Climate change and its consequences are generally considered to be the principal reason for out-migration. However, the lack of jobs at home and access to better facilities for education elsewhere are contributing factors (Nordic Council of Ministers 2011). When asked about the problem of out-migration, most of the respondents agreed that the reason for out-migration is not only a lack of jobs, but also a lack of higher educational opportunities. Hannele, born in 1932, noted: 'We had a

good life once, but today our home has been left empty. The children moved to another city because of jobs and other opportunities they sought.'

Where mining and other such activities replace the traditional means of livelihood, there may be new job opportunities for young adults. In other locations, however, young people migrate to cities in the southern part of the country. For young adults, especially young women, it is common to leave the region. The region's older persons are left behind. This situation creates problems of societal and economic security for them regardless of gender and ethnicity. On the one hand, the absence of the young generation, especially adult women, means a lack of family care and support. On the other, it causes economic stress, as older persons cannot support themselves alone. In addition, the breakup of the family caused by out-migration results in isolation for older persons, causing severe mental stress. Since older women in the region generally live longer than their male counterparts, they require the most physical and mental support, which seem to be less well organised in the region compared to urban settings.

In this context it is also important to note that facilities for older persons are not easily accessible in the rural areas of the region studied. There is only a handful of homes for old people, most located in relatively large cities. One respondent, Tuula from Ivalo, while speaking about her elderly mother, stated:

We do not have an old people's home in our area. The nearest one is located in Ivalo, which is about 160 km away from our village. We have to maintain a good network with our neighbours so that they can take care of my mother when needed.

Even when the necessary facilities are available, it has been found to be hard, especially for older women, to be detached from their natural surroundings. Birgit, from Sweden, shared an old Sámi woman's experience of moving to an old people's home in the following words:

At the age of 99, an old lady went to a service institution. Such an institution actually made her feel sad. Even though her house (where she used to live alone) was located far away from all services she needed, she wanted to stay there as long as she could. She wanted to be in nature, eat her own traditional food and listen to Sámi music in her own surroundings. But in the home she cannot do things as she wants; she cannot go outside when she wishes. Homes for old people generally lack economic resources and as a result it was not possible to take her out once a day into nature to make her feel fresh and better.

It can be concluded that while the effects of the livelihood transformation in the Nordic Arctic are both positive and negative, the position of older people in general and of older women in particular, remains relatively vulnerable. In this section, attention was drawn to the vulnerability of the region's older women in terms of the economic, physical and mental conditions that affect their general well-being. Based on the above observations, the next

section analyses their vulnerability from the viewpoint of specific human rights applicable to older women as articulated in GR 27 of the CEDAW.

### **Older women's vulnerability in light of General Recommendation 27**

In order to promote equality and non-discrimination where elderly women's rights are concerned, GR 27 obliges state parties to address various existing forms of discrimination against older women. GR 27 explores the inter-relationship of the CEDAW's 30 articles. It identifies different kinds of discrimination women face throughout their life in respect to aging as regards social pension, empowerment, housing, health and well-being and inheritance.

GR 27 further aims to include elderly women in decision-making processes. They are to be empowered by various means such as by having proper education and training to adapt to new situations while being allowed access to relevant facilities, such as social and health care, for older people. It is the role of the government to implement gender-sensitive policies to ensure older women's full and equal participation in the relevant sectors (Begum 2012). In what follows the situation of older women in Lapland in light of GR 27 is examined.

In rural communities, both in Finnish and Swedish Lapland, the rate of women's participation in the formal labour market is lower compared to the national average (Nordic Council of Ministers 2011). In Finland, for example, historically, part-time work was not common, but today it seems to be more typical for rural women. It is suggested that men's position in the labour market has always been better than women's (Högbacka 1998: 178–181). In Finland and Sweden, a significant population decline in remote areas has been recorded in recent decades and the Nordic Arctic region has become even more sparsely populated (Nordic Council of Ministers 2011). Finland, Sweden, and Norway each have a population density of around 16 to 23 people per km<sup>2</sup> (Nordic Council of Ministers nd.). According to Statistics Finland in 1985, 24 per cent of the country's population lived in sparsely populated areas, whereas by 1995 the proportion had declined to 19 per cent. In 1995 there were approximately 505,000 men and 462,000 women living in sparsely populated areas (Högbacka 1998). Data from 2014 indicate that Finnish Lapland has shown the sharpest decline in population (Statistics Finland 2014). One of the reasons for this decline is out-migration because of the lack of jobs. Traditional activities have been found less attractive, less well remunerated and less valued. Consequently, many such activities have gradually disappeared. For example, in Finnish Lapland, cattle rearing used to be a traditional livelihood in households in the village of Kultima, but it was discontinued as far back as in the mid-1970s (Pennanen 2006: 181).

Nevertheless, as mentioned, reindeer herding continues to be the most common traditional livelihood in

both Finnish and Swedish Lapland, although the work has become more modernised. Women make a significant contribution in herding (Rantala 2013: 114–116) as they work side by side with their husbands. However, this role is largely ignored. The Finnish Association of Herding Cooperatives has reported that during the period between June 2012 and May 2013 there were a total of 4,532 reindeer herders (Reindeer Herders Association, personal communication (e-mail), 15 October 2015). The numbers of women and men were 1,324 and 3,157, respectively. Among herders, 1,704 are at the age of 55 years or above, of whom 382 are women and 1,322 men. According to Swedish statistics, approximately 10 to 25 per cent of herders are women, which means that men own larger herds than women (Udén 2011).

To date, the academic literature has paid little attention to women's role in reindeer herding and fishing. In northern Norway, women's participation in fish-processing work and share of fishing quotas has declined (Gerrard 2008). Women also have been ignored and largely been excluded from direct accesses to fishing quotas (Neis, and others 2013). Moreover, the Sámi Parliament in Norway has documented gender-related inequality in the regulation and quota system (*ibid.*).

In herding, the division of labour between men and women is not formally structured, and women's role is mostly invisible in written descriptions of the occupation (Ruotsala 2007: 156–157). Women are also less well represented when developing policies for a gendered division of labour in herding activities (Kuokkanen 2009). In Sweden and Norway, policies and legislation relating to the practice of reindeer herding are not gender neutral (Kuokkanen 2009). In Finland, the government's policies since 1945 have in fact made Sámi women invisible in the reindeer-herding sector: since 1978, in official records, reindeer-owning Sámi women have been registered under their husbands' names, causing them to lose their individual membership in the herding cooperatives (Kuokkanen 2011).

Overall, it can be argued, the contribution of women to livelihoods in the Nordic Arctic has been undervalued, for their involvement is mostly informal. The household work they do, such as cooking, taking care of children and other caring work, has been viewed as less important in official descriptions of the economy. However, they take on a great deal of responsibility for their family in looking after their older family members, their children and also for the men in their lives (Bull 1995: 44; Capistrano 2010: 14; Ignatieff 2007: 117). However, their familial responsibilities do not translate into wage labour (Mies and Bennholdt 1999). Research shows that attitudes on gender equality and gender-equal practices are influenced by income (Holter and others 2009). In addition, women are involved in the voluntary sector (the third sector), which includes various social services, health care and informal activities. However, these activities are also unpaid (Pennanen 2006:179). As a result, these import-

ant contributions of women often go unrecognised and undervalued (Begum 2012: 5).

The above trends seem to have implications for older women in the region. Women considered 'elderly' may face inequalities in economic status in the future because of their lower visibility in the labour market. For example, women receive a lower old-age pension than men, whose contributions are formally acknowledged. At times, women receive no pension at all, as their contributions are as equated with wage labour. Even though women in the northern communities in Lapland have become more educated and empowered in recent times, there still exist hidden inequalities. The jobs usually held by women are less well remunerated. For example, a man with a three-year technical education earns more than a woman with a three-year education as a nurse (Mørkhaugen 2009; Eurostat news 2015). It should be noted that most of those in the nursing profession are women. This gender-based discrimination in employment throughout life results in lower incomes (Mandel and Semyenov 2006) affecting economic security in old age. Another example of hidden inequality is that while Finnish inheritance law prescribes that men and women have equal rights, according to Sámi customary law, women possess fewer rights in regard to inheritance (Bremmer 2012). For example, the system of reindeer-herding cooperatives has had adverse effects on women within Sámi society. According to customary law, both the men and women in a household used to own reindeer but today the leaders of most cooperatives are men. In addition, a change has occurred in the practice of herding that has led many Sámi women to transfer ownership of their reindeer to their husbands (Åhrén 2004). Moreover, the use of modern equipment in herding that require efforts generally suitable for men has increased, causing a decline in their participation in it (Bremmer 2012). Such practices make women weaker in society. It is therefore important that women should be empowered to tackle the challenges of old age in terms of both economics and status.

In order to improve the well-being of older women, the promotion of equality and non-discrimination in national and regional policies is necessary. Such policy development can be guided by established principles, such as those recognised, for example, in CEDAW's GR 27, which provides an international standard for the promotion of older women's rights. GR 27 enumerates important issues, such as education, social pension, empowerment, adequate housing, health and well-being, and inheritance, which figure significantly when gauging the effects of livelihood transformation on older women. GR 27 clearly states that discrimination generally differs depending on older women's socio-economic circumstances, as they are not a homogenous group. However, it emphasises that the socio-economic, political and cultural rights of older women are to be safeguarded. In fact, through its provisions GR 27 offers a protection strategy to safeguard women from all aspects of the challenges affecting them when they are older (Begum 2012: 7) that,



if put in place, offers mitigations of the risks facing older women in Lapland. The strategy put forward in the GR 27 specifically points to the importance of recognising the positive economic and social contributions which older women have made throughout their lives to both their families and society at large. They must also be valued independently for their economic and societal contributions. Their wisdom, knowledge and experiences are referred to expressly.

To sum up, it should be noted that the various effects on older women of the change in livelihoods occurring in the Nordic Arctic, especially Finnish and Swedish Lapland, have to be viewed from the point of view of social justice. The varieties of challenges faced by the older women in this context can arguably be met by the implementation of GR 27. Even though the Nordic countries progressively adhere to the legally established rights of older women compared to other parts of the world, there are still some hidden or unspoken practices that impinge on older women's rights. Observation of the various provisions of GR 27 by the states parties would improve the situation of older women and their distinct identity, and thereby promote equality and social justice.

### Conclusion

The Nordic Arctic is more developed than other regions of the Arctic. While the Nordic Arctic was referred to in this paper, field studies focused only in Finnish and Swedish Lapland. There are some differences between Swedish and Finnish Lapland in women's role and place in the context of livelihood transformation. Swedish Lapland appears to be relatively more advanced and women in a better position compared to Finnish Lapland, especially in the area of traditional handicrafts related entrepreneurship. As shown in this research, the region as a whole is relatively progressive in terms of ensuring equality and non-discrimination. Women are generally well treated. Education facilities and empowerment of women are well regarded. Nevertheless, there are gaps where equality is concerned, referred to here as hidden or unspoken inequalities, that affect women in the specific context of the combination of livelihood transformation and ageing. These gaps lie in economic security in old age, empowerment and the capacity to adapt to socio-cultural changes.

In order to promote equality among older persons, with special consideration for older women it is advisable that policy makers, the research community, relevant stakeholders and older people in the region work together in both the national and regional policy frameworks. One of the more urgent priorities in this effort would be to tackle the risk and threats posed by livelihood transformation and other changes. In pursuing this end, women's participation in decision-making processes should be guaranteed. In addition, since livelihood transformation causes a threat to health and wellbeing of the older people, innovation, such as telemedicine systems need to

be promoted for in remote areas of the region to ensure access to health care facilities. Furthermore, due regard has to be given to the enormous range of experience and the traditional knowledge that older persons possess and the value of this as a resource in addressing problems both at national and international/regional and local level.

As a basis for promoting older women's rights the salient issues based on both literature and interviews were examined while the principles set out in GR 27 of the CEDAW were referred to. If Finland, Norway and Sweden, all of which have ratified the convention, take the specific measures recommended by GR 27 with due consideration for the hidden inequalities shown in this research, the right to equality and non-discrimination of elderly women in the context of livelihood transformation can be further improved. However, in the author's view more research is needed to identify older women's perceptions of the extent to which equality has been realised in the face of other major changes in the Nordic region.

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