

Monitoring of oil development in traditional indigenous lands of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug

Project under the International Polar Year (IPY) programme

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In ANSIPRA Bulletin No. 11 (July 2004) we introduced our intention to start up with a monitoring project in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug to document the interference of oil development and traditional land use. Due to the lack of funds the project has not been implemented yet. However, the project is now listed as qualified for funding by the Norwegian IPY committee and has a very good chance to get funded in 2007-08.

IPY funding will hopefully cover the basic costs. Additional funding will be needed to increase the amount and improve the quality of data. We think that the GIS database will be a useful planning tool not only for indigenous peoples' organisations, but also for administration and oil companies. For this reason we republish our plans here in hopes to attract additional funds from these stakeholders.

The following is a very rough summary. A detailed project description can be obtained from the authors.



Nenets reindeer herders' summer camp. Photo: Yasavey



Tundra damaged by oil drilling. Photo: Yasavey

Background

Approximately 7750 Nenets and 4500 Izhma-Komi indigenous people (census 2002), many of them somehow related to reindeer husbandry, live in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (NAO). Large portions of Nenets reindeer pastures, especially in the neighbouring Yamal area, were devastated by reckless oil prospecting in the 1960s to 1980s. The recent decade has witnessed an increasing interest in the hydrocarbon occurrences in the NAO. Naturally, people are worried about their future. In addition to the high unemployment among indigenous peoples, the situation in the reindeer husbandry sector is deteriorating: decreasing numbers of reindeer, misappropriation, absence of appropriate marketing schemes for products. These and other factors provoke a general degradation of indigenous society.

Legal norms for implementation of federal laws on land ownership and land use are still absent in the NAO. Land can be allotted for industrial and resource-extractational purposes, while users receive miserly financial compensations. Participation of the indigenous peoples' organisations and representatives of the concerned communities and farms is a fairly new achievement. Processes result in agreements, where the amount of financial compensation is regulated.

An uncontrolled situation has developed around oil and gas exploitation in many parts of the NAO, where some oil companies are accused for grave violations of ecological standards and Russian legislation. Numerous oil spillages and other degradations of the upper soil layers occur periodically in the tundra during the summer season, inflicting irreparable damage to the Arctic natural environment.

Nenets and Izhma-Komi in this region have for many centuries maintained a traditional way of life rooted firmly in reindeer husbandry in the area. These are the people who mainly suffer as a result of the attitudes of newcomers to the Arctic natural environment, in spite of all legal guarantees.

A severe obstacle for the traditional land users to defend their rights is the lack of data to overview the situation. Comprehensive monitoring through regional authorities was last done several years ago and is not easily available to the public, while the situation changes considerably every year. A continually maintained map database showing traditional land use and hydrocarbon development, available to all relevant groups, would be an indispensable tool to control development.

Project summary

Intensive oil-and-gas development occurs under Arctic conditions in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug (NAO). Severe impacts occur, both on the environment and on the socio-economic situation of the indigenous peoples living in and of the land.

The project aims at monitoring the situation and producing a GIS database, which documents activities and can be

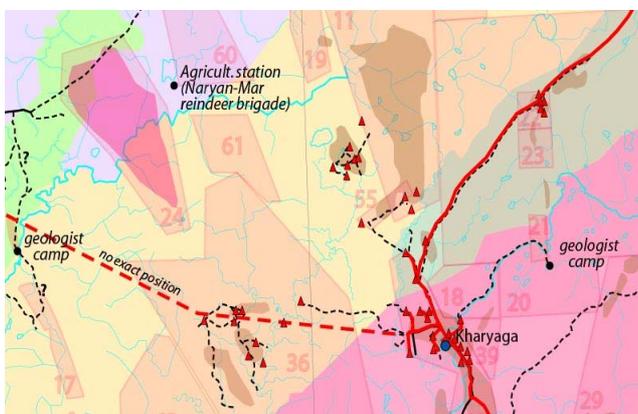
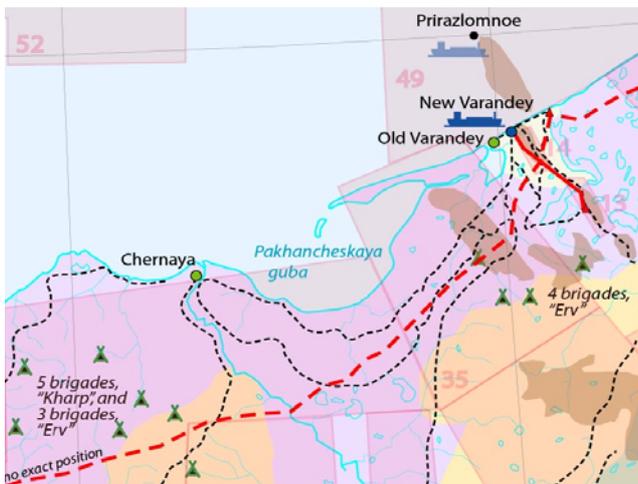
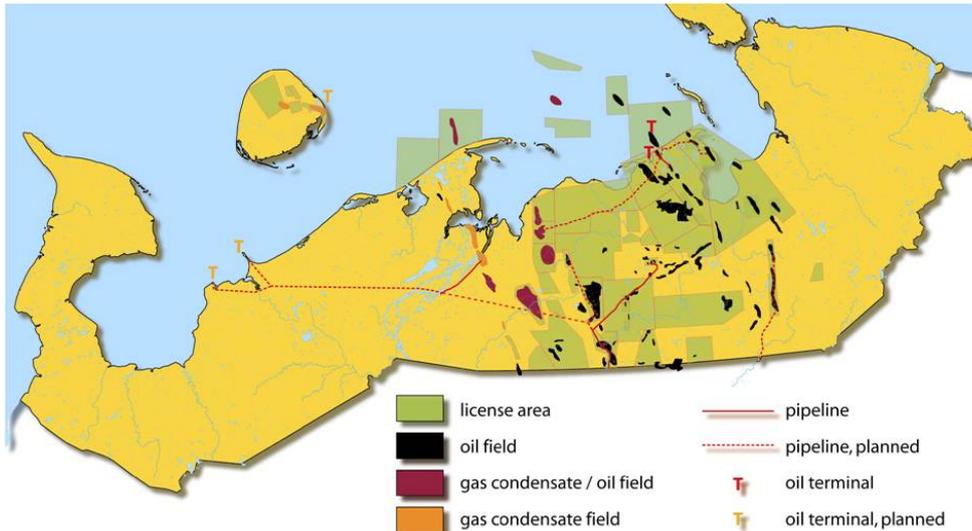
used to promote interests of traditional land users. The Norwegian Polar Institute will be in charge of the scientific issues and quality control, while the Association of Nenets People Yasavey, the major cooperation partner, will ensure that local indigenous peoples' knowledge and needs are taken care of.

Both natural and social scientific methods will be applied to acquire data on oil and gas development as well as traditional occupations, mainly reindeer herding. Data sources are published data, personal observations of indigenous representatives, questioning of local residents in selected areas of the NAO, photo documentation, inquiries at administration and oil companies, and satellite image survey. Local GIS expertise, the Nenets Information and Analytical Center (NIAC), and representatives of the local administration are involved in the project.

The GIS database will show the physical and ethnogeography of the NAO, as well as visible and reported impacts derived from hydrocarbon prospecting and production. Data will be presented as an interactive map to 1:1 mill., though more detailed in areas where the density of acquired data demands it. Map elements will be linked with descriptive, explanatory and interpreted data in text and image formats. Contained data will be discussed in environmental, socio-economic, anthropological and human-security-related contexts. For this purpose an internationally composed expert group representing all relevant scientific disciplines has formed.

The database will be posted on the Internet, accessible for the public. If demanded, some classified data may be open only for authorised users. Data will also be published in bilingual (English and Russian) reports. To make sure that data presentation complies with Russian law, Russian legal expertise (RAIPON, Rodnik Legal Center) is attached to the project.

After cessation of the project the database will be administered locally in the NAO. Yasavey will be trained in using and maintaining it.



Sections of the base map, with data from a preliminary map compilation (old satellite data, no quality control). Infrastructure is shown in black, oil drilling sites and pipelines in red, licence areas in shaded pink, oil and gas fields in brown and pink patches, places related to reindeer breeding in green, existing and planned oil terminals in blue, etc. Base colours show reindeer herding enterprises. The preliminary map, which has been prepared, covers the entire NAO (see separate attachment). Maps: W. Dallmann

Overview map of the Nenets Autonomous Okrug showing oil and gas development. Map: W. Dallmann