PROTECTING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES’ RIGHTS TO THEIR NATURAL RESOURCES
— THE CASE OF RUSSIA
Of the 45 indigenous peoples in Russia with populations of fewer than 50,000, 40 live in the North, Siberia, and the Far East. These same areas are rich in natural resources, such as oil, gas and minerals, and they are the sites of large energy projects like pipelines and hydroelectric dams. Any industrial project taking place on indigenous peoples’ lands presents a threat and elicits concern among the indigenous population. A newly-published map entitled “Places for Potential Conflict Between Industrial Companies and Numerically Small Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East,” from the Center for Support of Indigenous Peoples of the North (www.csipn.ru) identifies 70 hotspots with potential for conflict. Legislation on indigenous peoples’ rights is designed to identify and reduce conflict between industries and indigenous peoples. But does such legislation exist in Russia? And what are interactions between indigenous peoples and corporations like in reality?

Current political and socio-economic situation of the peoples of Northern Russia

The Russian Federation’s constitution recognizes the concept of “numerically small indigenous peoples” and its Article 69 “guarantees rights in accordance with generally accepted principles and norms in international law and international agreements of the Russian Federation” to these peoples. In 2000, the Russian federal government approved the Official List of Numerically Small Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation, a list that included 45 peoples.
Of these peoples, 40 live in the North or in regions with severe environmental conditions similar to the North.\textsuperscript{1}

In 1990, the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) was founded as an umbrella organization for regional indigenous associations. Over the years, RAIPON has gained significant authority and influence both with Russian government agencies and in the international arena. Although RAIPON lacks the authority to propose legislative initiatives, its strong representation has facilitated the passage of laws (see footnote 2) for the protection of numerically small indigenous peoples. Specifically, these include three federal laws. RAIPON’s outreach work in the areas of legal and environmental education of indigenous peoples has greatly raised awareness among Russian indigenous peoples in recent years. (See Kryazhkov and Murashko, 2005). In 2004, RAIPON included the Association of Komi-Izhemtsy, an indigenous people not included in the official list of the Russian government.

The 2002 Population Census indicated that numerically small indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia, and the Far East totalled approximately 250,000 individuals. Ethnologists noted a significant population growth. This is mainly related to the post-Soviet government’s promise of socio-economic rights for indigenous peoples, in contrast with the 1970s when identification as Russian was encouraged among indigenous peoples (Bogoyavlenskiy, 2004).

### Socio-economic situation

The dissolution of kolkhozes, sovkhozes, and gospromkhozes that had provided almost full employment for indigenous peoples in Soviet Russia led to the loss of a majority of jobs on their traditional lands. As a result, unemployment levels among indigenous peoples have risen eight-fold over the last decade (compared to 3.5 times in Russia as a whole). Today, earnings for indigenous people are 2-3 times lower than the national average. The birth rate is down by 69% in comparison with 1995, while mortality has increased by 35.5%. The average life expectancy for indigenous people is 10-20 years lower than the Russian average. The average life expectancy for an indigenous man is 42 years and in some places it is even lower than 30. The standard of public health has decreased for indigenous peoples of the North. The number of hospitals and schools in small indigenous villages is falling, and may lead to the reappearance of illiteracy.

Facing the loss of the economic infrastructure they had grown accustomed to during the years of Soviet power, indigenous peoples are creating obshchinas\textsuperscript{3} and native co-operatives in order to organize their economic activities. It is very difficult to accurately assess the number of such organizational structures, as some spontaneous obshchinas are unregistered, while others register but are unable to cope with com-
Open-pit coal mining in Kemerovo - Photo: Kathrin Wessendorf

The banner says: “...oil workers, remember on whose land you are working”, V.V. Putin, Salekhard, 2004 - Photo: Kyh-Kyh Center Sakhalin
plex bookkeeping and tax regulations and cease to exist as legal entities. The obshchinas’ difficult economic situation is further complicated by the uncertainty and challenges they face in accessing their main source of existence – the right to use natural resources and lands for traditional purposes.

**Rights to Land and Natural Resources**

The issue of indigenous land rights in Russia is still an open question. For all practical purposes, the government owns all land and natural resources in the Russian North. Some of these lands – “lands for agricultural use” – are under the joint control of the Russian Federation and its provinces. During the collectivization period (beginning in 1930), a large portion of the lands traditionally settled on and used by peoples of the North, were handed over to kolkhozes and sovkhozes, which in most cases were managed by non-indigenous peoples. However, indigenous peoples did continue to use these lands for reindeer herding, hunting, and fishing. Today, the state auctions these lands to new leaseholders and private parties.

Although in 1999 the law “On Guarantees of the Rights of the Numerically Small Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation” proclaimed the right of indigenous people to the free use of their traditional lands for the purposes of conducting traditional economic activities, the Russian federal Land Code (2001) did not provide the same right. The resulting legal contradiction has, to this day, not been resolved despite numerous attempts by RAIPON to lobby parliamentary deputies for the necessary changes in the Land Code. The government opposes these changes, considering them to be economically inexpedient. At the same time, the law “On territories of traditional natural resource use of the Numerically Small Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation”, adopted in 2001, which intends to secure indigenous land rights, has not yet been implemented (Murashko, Sibirika.2006).

In practice, indigenous obshchinas are not able to acquire rights to lands for hunting, fishing, or reindeer pastures, and without documentation indicating rights to the use of these lands, they cannot obtain hunting licenses or fishing quotas. Since 2006, lands traditionally used by indigenous peoples are being auctioned off as long-term leases to resource extraction companies, and commercial fishing, hunting, and tourist operations.

Sometimes, these new owners of traditional lands employ the local indigenous people who find themselves in a difficult position under crippling terms. The hunting lands in Amur Oblast are a case in point. In 2006, lands belonging to former reindeer sovkhozes were put up for auction as hunting lands. The applications of eight Evenk obshchinas were rejected from the competition on the basis of incomplete documents. The hunting lands went instead to commercial companies. The new owners offered Evenk hunters licenses, however, to be used under the conditions of the owners, which did not take into consideration the indigenous life-style that combines the hunting with reindeer farming. These new commercial owners were primarily interested in the number and quality of sable skins they could collect from hunters (Murashko, 2007). The obshchinas joined together and filed a lawsuit. With the assistance of a RAIPON lawyer, and the tireless efforts of Elena Kolesova, chairman of the Association of Evenk of Amur Oblast, the eight trials were won, and the decisions of the auction commission were revoked as it was proved that procedures had been violated.

**Legal rights and interactions with industrial companies**

The Land Code stipulates that “community gatherings and referendums may be conducted regarding the withdrawal of land for concessions in areas traditionally occupied and used for economic purposes by numerically small indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation and ethnic obshchinas if the land is to be used for non traditional economic activities.” The organization of such referendums is the duty of the local authorities. The federal law “On Environmental Impact Assessments” (from 1995) and the Civil Construction Code of the Russian Federation contain requirements to conduct public hearings regarding industrial projects, which project initiators and local authorities are responsible for organizing.

As neither the boundaries of “places of traditional habitats and economic activity of numerically small indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation” have been identified nor have procedures been established to ensure participation in referendums and public hearings of those peoples whose traditional lands will be impacted by the projects, public monitoring by indigenous peoples is replaced with superficial project presentations for citizens at meetings in cities and towns far from the actual project site.

The 1995 law on Environmental Impact Assessments requires that project impact evaluations take place in order to warn against possible negative im-
pacts and to develop programs identifying or mitigating negative impacts on the surrounding environment and related social, economic, and other project impacts. In 2004, former president V. V. Putin introduced the term “corporate social responsibility,” and at a meeting in Salekhard stated, “Oilmen! You must remember whose land you are using!” Paradoxically in 2006, the law “On Environmental Impact Assessments” was amended, and as a result the definition of Environmental Impact Assessment no longer includes the phrase “related social, economic, and other project impacts.” The bill “On Environmental Impact Assessments” evaluating social and cultural impacts was not passed.

As a result, indigenous peoples today do not have the legal right to ownership, use, or possession of the land on which they live, hunt, fish, or graze their reindeer. Companies are not formally required to seek their permission for the implementation of projects, to evaluate damage to the native lands, to develop programs to mitigate negative impacts, or to compensate the indigenous population for conditions arising as a result of project implementation and industrial use of lands and other traditional natural resources.

Khanty-Mansi, Yamal-Nenets and Nenets Autonomous Okrugs
Regional laws requiring companies to negotiate industrial projects with local indigenous representatives were passed in 1996 and 1997 in Yamal-Nenets, Nenets, and Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrugs. In Yamal-Nenets and Nenets Autonomous Okrugs, lands are legally assigned to agricultural cooperatives that were developed from old reindeer farming sovkhozes. However, the reality is that more than half of all domesticated reindeer using these pastures are privately owned by indigenous families and obshchinas. Yet project negotiations and resulting contracts are with official land rights holders – the directorates of agricultural cooperatives and regional administrations. While reindeer-farming families and obshchinas, who will be impacted by the project, may not be involved at all.

More than 500 obshchina-based territories of traditional natural resource use have been registered in Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug. If privately or state owned companies want to use these lands, they are required to negotiate agreements with each obshchina. More than half of these 500 obshchinas have already made such agreements. However, insufficient experience among the indigenous peoples in evaluating the long-term results of industrial land use and the absence or inadequacy of methodologies for assessing losses of traditional natural resource use
have resulted in a failure of the received compensation to cover all damage to traditional lifestyle and activities. Nor does it compensate for lost profit from traditional production that a family or obshchinas might have secured on those lands for centuries to come. This has led to obshchinas partially, and in some cases completely, losing traditional lands. Many representatives from the indigenous peoples negotiating these agreements have moved to the cities but not found work, because there are no programs to retrain these forced migrants, provide them with jobs, or provide affordable housing.

Regional laws in Nenets, Yamal-Nenets, and Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrugs require industrial companies to plan for the presence of the indigenous population on lands they use for industrial projects and to pay special compensation for damage. However, these regional laws cannot protect the traditional lands and economy of indigenous peoples. There are many reasons for this: efforts by local authorities to preserve old centralized structures (sovkhozes) from which they receive income; disregard for new economic structures such as obshchinas; inexperience on the part of indigenous organizations in evaluating the long-term impacts of industrial projects; and, most importantly, the absence of federal laws designed to protect the rights and interests of indigenous peoples.

Sakhalin
For several years, the Association of Indigenous Peoples of Sakhalin Oblast has been fighting for the right to participate in discussions concerning the impacts of oil extraction on the Sakhalin Shelf and the construction of pipelines on Sakhalin. Inattention by the Sakhalin Oblast administration and companies to the indigenous peoples forced the Association of Indigenous Peoples of Sakhalin Oblast to unite with “greens,” and together with the environmental NGO Green Wave they organized actions at pipeline construction sites in 2005 (Murashko, 2005).

Protesters’ demands were laid out in a Memorandum and draft Agreement that indigenous organizations asked companies working on Sakhalin to sign. The demands included the following main points: assess project impacts on the environment and on the traditional way of life of the indigenous peoples; define compensation levels and create a fund for the administration of these compensation payments for indigenous develop-
ment projects; create co-management structures for this fund with the participation of representatives from Sakhalin’s indigenous population.

The protest took place 20-23 January 2005 in Noglik Rayon, where pipeline construction work for Sakhalin-1 and Sakhalin-2 by Exxon Neftegaz Limited and Sakhalin Energy Investment Company Ltd. and their subcontractors was already underway. In 30° below zero over two hundred men, women, and children gathered, representing the Nivkh and Even. They stood near a number of pipes that had appeared on a site sacred to the Nivkh and they signed a list of demands for the company. When it had been verified that no company representatives had attended the meeting, they blocked off all roads so the trucks carrying pipes could not get through.

This protest was a critical moment in relations between the indigenous peoples, energy companies, and the authorities on Sakhalin. Thanks to the involvement of RAIPON, the January 2005 action and the legal demands of its participants received a great deal of international coverage and support. This was especially discomfiting to Sakhalin Energy Company, as they were applying for credit from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and had indicated that they would abide by the Bank’s recommended “World Bank Operational Policy 4.10 - Indigenous Peoples” in their project documentation and project implementation (Murashko, 2005).

In the summer of 2005, Sakhalin Energy representatives and Sakhalin’s indigenous peoples, represented by the Regional Council for Authorized Representatives of Numerically Small Peoples of Northern Sakhalin Oblast, met to negotiate and develop a joint “Plan for facilitating the development of numerically small indigenous peoples of Sakhalin Oblast.” The Regional Council proposed that the company created a permanent operating structure for implementing the Plan – an Observation Council based on a model of the regional consultative council in use in Alaska under similar conditions. This council includes representatives of the indigenous peoples, environmental community organizations, government authorities and companies.

The Observation Council’s powers as well as the process for implementing the Development Plan have become examples of the trilateral Agreement on cooperation of the Regional Indigenous Peoples Council, Sakhalin Energy, and the Oblast administration signed on 25 May 2006. This agreement requires Sakhalin Energy to provide $300,000 annually to finance the Development Plan for five years, beginning 1 June 2006. According to the agreement, the Development Plan is managed by the Observation Council. The Observation Council is led by the acknowledged leader of the indigenous peoples, Aleksey Limanzo. It should be noted that indigenous women conduct all technical work related to the preparation and subsequent monitoring of projects for traditional development and social aid; they are also the most active participants in seminars related to the project.

In early 2007, Sakhalin Oblast authorities passed legislation requiring mandatory environmental impact assessments on Sakhalin Oblast. Other companies working on Sakhalin, such as Exxon and Rosneft, are ignoring these regional laws because they are not supported by federal laws (Murashko and Yakel, 2008).4

Other regions

Indigenous organizations in Krasnoyarsk Krai, Irkutsk Oblast, Sakha Republic, Yakutiya, Amur Oblast, Khabarovsk Krai, and Primorye Krai have all announced their intention to participate in discussing projects and organizing indigenous monitoring in terms of design and project inception relating to the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean pipeline, the Evenkiyskaya Hydroelectric Dam, and the cascade of dams on the rivers of southern Yakutiya. This intentions is, however, being ignored by companies due to the lack of corresponding regulations in federal law.

Current trends in the behavior of companies and the authorities – Kamchatka as an example

Calls from the international community compel companies to consider existing international standards relating to environmental and social issues in their work, especially in the implementation of large-scale energy projects and in the extraction and transportation of raw hydrocarbons. Practice in Russia, however, shows that companies go no further than announcements regarding adherence to international standards, while in the actual project documentation and during project implementation, they limit themselves to a very narrow selection of environmental demands, completely disregarding the rights of indigenous peoples. This was well illustrated by the discussions in 2007-2008 concerning the oil and gas extraction projects on the Kamchatka Shelf in the Okhotsk Sea. Despite public protests by the community, along with a Public Environmental Impact Assessment (henceforth PEIA) of the project as permitted by law, the project’s State Environmental Impact Assessment was approved, and the project has been underway since July 2008. The Lach Ethno-Ecological
Information Center of the Indigenous Peoples of Kamchatka, which employs indigenous people, participated in collecting information for the PEIA.

Although Rosneft’s project documentation mentions the Equator Principles, the technical project documentation does not even review risks to traditional coastal fishing and marine mammal hunting on the Okhotsk coast of Kamchatka Krai and Magadan Oblast that could result in decreased harvests of traditional resources or the possible socio-economic crises that could befall this population in the case of an accident. It is particularly telling that when the PEIA experts pointed to the lack of materials evaluating the project’s impacts on the indigenous peoples, one of the State Environmental Impact Assessment experts asked, “What laws obligate the project documentation to contain such an evaluation?”

PEIA experts asked many questions of Rosneft project designers regarding the absence of social risk assessments for the project. For example, why does project documentation make no mention of ways of eliminating possible famine for the indigenous and local population in the event of a drilling explosion and resulting oil blowout, although illustrations in the chapter dedicated to emergency oil spill management show that the extent of the spill would reach the Kamchatka coastline? Do project implementers have back-up resources to pay for spill cleanup and to compensate traditional fishermen and marine mammal hunters for damage and losses related to their primary source of existence? In answer to the question regarding compensation to the indigenous peoples, the response was that following a damage assessment, the law would determine compensation for users of fishing grounds.

For the indigenous peoples, this means that they would most likely receive nothing. According to the law, indigenous peoples have the right to fish for “personal needs,” but without the allocation of any fishing grounds. In other words, they are not legal users. To the question of whether or not the indigenous
peoples of remote villages along the Okhotsk coastline would survive until their turn came in the calculation of damage and compensation in the event of an accident, we naturally received no answer. That wouldn’t be Rosneft’s problem.

Almost all the Itel’men (862 individuals) live in coastal villages in the southern Tigil’ Rayon of Kamchatka Krai. Living in the area of a potential oil spill, they are at great risk. Their unique culture and language are extremely vulnerable and they face the loss of both in the event of forced resettlement. Recently, residents of the village of Kovran in Tigil’ Rayon, the only village in Kamchatka where the Itel’men form a majority, reported that the first commercial fishing area had appeared on their river, precisely where Kovran residents fished using traditional fishing gear. An indigenous obshchina in Kovran participated in the fishing rights auction, but lost its bid to a commercial company. The appearance of this fishing company is a doubly troubling sign for Kovran residents. Firstly, those who stand with their nets closest to the river’s mouth are first to catch fish returning from the sea. Secondly, the commercial grounds are allocated to the leaseholder for twenty years, and in the event of a man-made accident, it is the leaseholder that receives compensation. So not only could Kovran residents lose fish, they would also not be compensated for that loss.

A century ago, V. N. Tyushov, a researcher working on Kamchatka’s western coast, wrote: “Fishing is the primary activity for residents, because fish constitutes a significant and exclusive food for them... Fish is eaten for breakfast; fish is served for lunch; they take their tea with fish; fish is their evening dinner.” (Tyushov, 1906:63-64). Today, nothing in that description has changed. There are no other sources of existence or nourishment other than fish for the indigenous peoples in Kovran and other coastal villages. In 1996, the Tkhsanom Itel’men Council demanded the creation of a special protected territory of traditional natural resource use in the southern portion of Tigil’
Rayon in order to protect the unique culture of Itel’men as well as salmon biodiversity. In 2008, following these demands, Kovran residents see the intrusion of a commercial fishing company on the last remaining Itel’men river – as well as drilling rigs. In response to protests by the Itel’men Council of Kamchatka regarding the auctioning of the Kovran River, the Vice Governor of Kamchatka Krai responsible for indigenous affairs announced, “Protest all you want – this is not ten years ago!”

After losing the auction, the Kovran obshchina submitted documents to the court claiming that the creation of a commercial salmon fishing area on the Kovran River, the announcement of the auction for the area, and the award of the fishing grounds to a commercial operation with no relation to the indigenous population of Kovran are in contradiction of sustainable use principles of biological resources in view of the interests of future generations, and are in violation of Russian law on indigenous rights (from information published by Lach Ethno-Ecological Information Center and O. Murashko, expert, www.raipon.org).

The outlook for new legislation

It is obvious that indigenous peoples’ rights to their traditional natural resources should be protected under federal law with the following regulations: 1) a process for the determination of boundaries for territories of traditional natural resource use and territories of traditional habitation and traditional economic activities of indigenous peoples; 2) a process for conducting Ethnologicheskaya Expertiza as instruments for assessing impacts on habitation areas and traditional sources of existence for indigenous peoples, and 3) special methods of evaluating impact assessments, and ratification of compensation and adaptation programs for indigenous populations affected by the negative effects of industrial development. A way for indigenous peoples to participate in the decision-making process to protect their lands and traditional way of life should be determined using conciliation.

The federal draft law entitled “On the protection of the environment, traditional way of life, and traditional natural resource use of indigenous small-numbered peoples in the Russian Federation” is dedicated to the resolution of these issues and was developed at the initiative of RAIPON by the Committee for Indigenous Affairs in the State Duma. At the end of 2007, passage of this bill was hindered by the Government’s conclusion that additional regulation in the area of protecting traditional habitation areas and traditional ways of life of indigenous peoples is not needed and that the draft law is thus unnecessary. Practice shows, however, that the centralized government of the Russian Federation is in need of such a law.

On 17 April 2008, the Russian Federation State Duma conducted parliamentary hearings on the same draft law. Representatives from the State Duma, the Council of Federations, and regional authorities as well as representatives from the world of science and the public spoke out on the timeliness and necessity of passing such a law. Two representatives from the largest resource extraction companies – LUKoil and Gazprom – were also present at the parliamentary hearings.

The LUKoil-Western Siberia representative told of the company’s experience interacting with the indigenous peoples of Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug, interactions based on federal and regional legislation. He stated, “In 2007, we entered economic agreements and contracts with 146 families totaling 578 individuals for 29 territories of traditional natural resource use. In the Malaya Ugra area (editor - Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug) over 500 regional-level territories of traditional natural resource use have been created. The locations of these territories coincide with over 220 licensed territories identified by resource extraction companies for oil and gas extraction….” He spoke of the need and relevance of passing a law such as the one being discussed and underscored the importance of developing objective scientific methods to calculate losses in traditional natural resource use.

Two people spoke out categorically against the draft bill: A representative from the Ministry of Regional Development and a Gazprom representative. In his presentation, the Director of Yamburg Gazprom Extraction stated, “The proposed draft law will create new, catastrophic, administrative barriers to subsoil resource companies… the bill under consideration concerns first and foremost peoples living in the Far North, Siberia, and the Far East. For Russia, these regions have been the historic sources of raw materials, fur, gold, timber, and now, mineral ores and fuel resources… According to the proposed law, conducting economic activities upon which federal and regional budgets depend to a significant degree – the energy security of the country – is only possible when accompanied by commensurate compensation by entering into an agreement by both sides. Moreover, negotiations must take place not only with obshchinas or other sorts of alliances, but also with each individual private reindeer-herder… A question – how many reindeer are required for each representative of indigenous peoples of the North for an adequate life?
Interest in the Arctic as one of the world’s last energy frontiers is increasing. With a focus on the North American Arctic, this book discusses how dreams of extracting resource wealth have been significant for shaping relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, as well as for the opening up of northern frontier regions to economic development. It looks at the emergence of the Arctic as an imagined hydrocarbon province and, through a discussion of plans to build pipelines and explore for oil and gas, it considers a number of case studies from Canada and Alaska which illustrate the perspectives, interests and concerns of indigenous peoples. (Forthcoming publication)

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