

New directions for managing Russia's Arctic

In a collaborative project GRID-Arendal works to implement integrated ecosystem management in north-western Russia. **BY TIINA KURVITS**

In a rapidly industrializing world, the Arctic is still one of the least impacted areas on the globe. We know that this region faces serious and growing pressures from human activities. We know too that the list is long: habitat fragmentation and destruction, biodiversity decline and loss, over-harvesting, contamination and pollution, climate change. Worrying issues at any level but to local people, they can quickly become matters of survival.

Of all the regions in the Arctic, these problems are particularly keenly felt in Russia's north. Here, the societal upheaval experienced after the collapse of the Soviet Union has only magnified the challenges of environmental protection. The threats to the environment here arise from shifting political and administrative systems, weak institutional and enforcement mechanisms, poorly controlled local economic development activities, declining funding for environmental protection, and national and international demands on natural resources.

New ways of managing nature

Traditionally, most environmental issues have been approached on a sectoral basis. The end has often been a patchwork of legislation, policies, and programs, each attempting to address an issue in isolation of others. While not without its successes, managing complex and intertwined issues requires a more coordinated and collaborative approach, one that looks at the ecosystem as a whole, including the people who live there. The situation in modern Russia in particular demands an approach that is adaptive and sensitive to rapidly changing needs. Integrated ecosystem management, or IEM, is an attempt to move in this direction.

IEM is a dynamic process aimed at managing human activities and relationships for the purpose of achieving specific conservation and development goals. By definition, it signifies a shift away from sectoral management toward one involving multiple stakeholders working together in an open and transparent environment. Although not a panacea, it does represent a more sound approach to environmental protection. It includes participatory planning, conflict resolution, community-based management, local institution building, sustainable use, and the equitable sharing of resources.

Conserving biodiversity in Northern Russia

Although IEM is used in many other regions of the world, there is little experience of it in Russia. In response to the challenges faced in Arctic Russia,

the Russian Federation, the Arctic Council program on Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF), and the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) key polar centre at GRID-Arendal have initiated an IEM project named ECORA: An integrated ecosystem management approach to conserving biodiversity and minimising habitat fragmentation in the Russian Arctic. Funded by the Global Environment Facility and a number of Arctic nations, ECORA is aimed at the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Russian Arctic. In addition to benefiting Russia, the project is aimed at making a substantial contribution to addressing these issues on a circumpolar basis.

In the ECORA project, IEM strategies and action plans will be developed and implemented in three model areas representing different ecosystems and anthropogenic pressures in the Russian Arctic. The areas selected are: Kolguev Island in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Kolyma River Basin in Yakutia, and Beringovsky in the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug. The model areas represent a cross-section of the Russian Arctic, reflecting different habitat types, indigenous peoples, and environmental issues.

A number of activities will be undertaken to support the development of the IEM plans. Among other things inventories on biodiversity and socio-economic assessments, and targeted training programs. GRID-Arendal will also facilitate legislative, administrative, and institutional capacity building and look at specific conservation measures. Finally, the project will provide demonstration activities for the sustainable use of natural resources and their genetic richness. The results and lessons learned are intended to be transferable and so benefit the entire Russian Arctic, as well as the broader circumpolar Arctic region. Using IEM, ECORA will help to secure the integrity of some of the world's last remaining pristine wilderness areas and support the livelihoods of the people that live there.

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ABOVE Habitat fragmentation at Narjan Mar, Nenets.



ABOVE Reindeer herders discuss the RAIPON journal at the opening of the Red Chum project in Kanin Peninsula in June 2002.

Capacity building in the Russian Arctic

In March 1998, leaders from 28 indigenous groups residing in Arctic Russia met to discuss common problems related to their threatened environment and natural resources. **BY KATHRINE I. JOHNSEN AND VALENTIN YEMELIN**

The main output of the 1998 seminar was an assessment report of indigenous peoples' environmental problems, proposed actions and request for help from international fora. This led to the development of the UNEP/Nordic Saami program for capacity building and participation of Russia's Indigenous Peoples in the sustainable development of the Arctic. The program supports the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) and is based on the experience and competence of Nordic Saami organisations in environment and development issues from an indigenous perspective. The program develops links to RAIPON and the United Nations through GRID-Arendal – the Key Polar Centre of UNEP.

The program is unique. It is designed to develop the capacity of the regional and central organisations of the indigenous peoples of Arctic Russia in the fields of environmental knowledge, networking, information, and awareness-raising. The program further supports sustainable development in Arctic Russia through focus on indigenous knowledge and strengthening of the capacity of the indigenous peoples to participate in the process. All program activities are defined from indigenous standpoints and priorities. The project consists of four main activities: Program management and RAIPON capacity building; networking and public relations; local reporting on health, environment and living conditions; and training courses in impact assessment.

Program management and RAIPON capacity building

This involves training of RAIPON staff in program and project development and management as well as training and seminars on institutional development.

This activity consists of coordination with other existing or planned donor supported RAIPON projects, feeding into annual reports and fund raising.

Networking and Public Relations

The purpose of this project is to enhance RAIPON's capacity to inform and communicate externally on the situation of the indigenous peoples of the north, Siberia and the Far east. The long-term capacity of the regional chapters of RAIPON to inform and communicate externally and internally is the goal. This includes supporting of RAIPON's journal and website. Production of a documentary on the living conditions of indigenous peoples of Arctic Russia is in the pipeline.

Local reporting on health, environment and living conditions

The third project is focused on producing indigenous knowledge based reports on health, environment and living conditions of indigenous peoples in Arctic Russia. These reports enable local communities to make their state of environment and living known both within Russia and internationally (including documentation of traditional land use). This involves regional structures and provides input to national, circumpolar and global assessments. Finally, this task also involves training RAIPON members in environmental reporting.

Training course in impact assessments

Ultimately, the program partners are developing a course that will train members of indigenous communities to conduct independent environmental impact assessments and to use other tools to assess projects influencing the

rights and interests of the indigenous peoples in Russia. This will include assessments of existing and planned industrial, communication and conservation developments that may have impact on indigenous peoples and their environment. During the summer of 2002, two surveys on indigenous peoples health, environment and living conditions were conducted in Arctic Russia. Data from the survey is in the process of being analysed. The results will be published late 2003 or early 2004. However, one of the main messages from the individuals in the survey is the lack of access to information. This is connected to the lack of infrastructure, outlined in Tamara Semenova's article *There and back again: accessibility is the key*.

Another important output from the survey is that people in general feel they have very little access to the federal authorities that take decisions with a direct impact on the environment, health and living conditions of indigenous communities and individuals.

There is a continuing need to ensure a reliable flow of information and to focus on awareness-raising amongst the Russian Arctic indigenous communities. Further, there is a need to continue developing the ability of indigenous communities to express and report on their state of environment and living.

Each year four issues of RAIPON's journal *Mir korennykh narodov – Zhivaya Arktika* (Indigenous World – Living Arctic) are published and disseminated to over 700 indigenous settlements in the Arctic Russia. A set of selected articles from the journal are translated into English and published on the RAIPON website. According to RAIPON, the journal is the most important channel for communication of regional and national information relevant to indigenous peoples in Russia. The regular publication of the journal is one of the printing issues of the program.

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