

Community-based observing for action in Yakutia, Russia

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Since 2017, Indigenous peoples' communities in Zhigansk and Olenek districts in Yakutia, Russia, have been monitoring the environment using community-based monitoring (CBM) approaches. Here, we describe how relative low-key CBM training efforts have contributed to provide Evenk communities with influence over the management of a number of subject areas related to natural resource management at both Republic and District level.

Since 2017, a community-based monitoring (CBM) capacity development process have been undertaken among selected indigenous peoples' communities in Yakutia, Russia, with support of the EU through the INTAROS programme. The CBM activities are primarily undertaken in communities of Zhigansk and Olenek districts in Sakha Republic, home to the Evenk indigenous communities.

The communities involved are mainly indigenous fishermen, hunters and reindeer herders who are heavily dependent on the living natural resources. They have been facing serious challenges in relation to accessing these resources due to changes in resource availability and threats, including pollution and resource depletion caused by various forms of mining developments, commercial fishing companies and changes in climate. The areas are classified as traditional areas of occupational use, protecting rights of Indigenous communities, but in practise it has been a challenge to enforce this legal status.

The organisations involved in the CBM process are the Centre for Support to Indigenous People of the North (CSIPN), the Republic Indigenous Peoples' Organisation of Sakha Republic and NORDECO (Nordic Foundation for Development and Ecology) from Denmark.

The CBM process has involved 20 workshops and meetings in the districts, with an average of some 10-15 people involved in each one. The workshops and meetings have focused on introducing CBM, building capacity to undertake CBM, and on how concrete CBM activities are being implemented in the respective communities. As of December 2019, eight CBM groups are actively observing their environment.

Key participants in workshops and meetings have included local fishermen, hunters and herders, local Indigenous peoples' representatives, various members of local authorities, and school students and teachers.

Local communities and local Indigenous peoples' representatives are interested in and supportive of the CBM activities. They see this as an improved way of developing and presenting local knowledge on resources and resource use. Local authorities are supportive of the activities. The Republic Indigenous Peoples' (IP) organisation is taking a leading role in activities. Input from the CBM groups (information, analysis and recommendations) has been used by the Republic IP organisation to seek influence on resource management issues both at Republic and District level. Organising and

communicating information are being undertaken using short forms, which are filled out by the CBM groups and which include resource information, analysis of information and suggested actions.

Examples of the impacts of the CBM activities include:

1. The CBM work is linking well with the process of seeking to put the territories of traditional land use into practise and activating the local IP organisations. The work with the CBM groups is helping the communities to become more the *subjects* of the development of the traditional land rather than just the *objects* of its development. It also contributes to monitoring of, and to having a dialogue with, the various industrial developments (mining) that are being undertaken and planned on traditional territories.
2. An *obshina* (community) in Zhigansk has obtained the rights to a traditional fishing ground partly because of its active participation in the CBM group. This work empowered the *obshina* and gave extra clout to their process of obtaining the rights.
3. The CBM groups have documented that two of the most important fish to the communities – Siberian cisco and Arctic cisco (*Coregonus sardinella*, *C. autumnalis*) – are swimming deeper in the Lena River due to warmer waters and are therefore difficult to catch with the permitted net types. This observation has been used by the IP organisation to influence changes in permitted net types.
4. Information on brown bear problems has been promoted at several meetings with the Republic's authorities in order to seek better solutions by which local people can protect themselves from bear attacks.
5. The information on wild reindeer hunting shows that reindeer hunting is very important to the communities and that local people are worried about its future due to industrial development (mines). The IP association has taken this to the mining company and agreed on a monitoring programme. Information on changes in the wild reindeer population, as well as a mismatch with the set hunting quotas, is also being used to influence the authorities' decisions on management of reindeer hunting.
6. Monitoring has raised problems of water pollution around the Alrosa diamond mining sites. The IP organisation has taken the problem of water quality monitoring to the District- and Republic-level authorities.
7. Establishment of the CBM groups has generally resulted in much more important information reaching the IP association from the communities, and this is proving useful in dialogues with the authorities.