

Gold Mining and Indigenous Rights: The Case of the Aginskoe Mine in Kamchatka, Russia

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The Aginskoe gold mine was developed 1994 in the Bystrinsky region of central Kamchatka by the Russian-Canadian-American joint venture, KAMGOLD. KAMGOLD is made up of the Canadian-based Kinross Gold Co., the U.S.-based Grynberg Resources Inc., and the Russian-based Kamchatgeologiya (Gordon, 1996). Appendix A contains additional background information on the project.

POSITIVE PROJECT FEATURES

- External mining development in Kamachotka is in its infancy; the Aginskoe mine is one of only a small number of development projects that have taken place to date on the peninsula. Therefore, the project is poised to set a precedent for future development ventures. If the indigenous communities and other stakeholders can develop an improved relationship with industrial interests, this relationship could potentially serve as a model for upcoming development projects.
- Indigenous groups in Kamchatka are in a position to learn from development projects that have progressed to later stages in neighboring areas, such as mining development in the Magadan Province and oil and gas development on Sakhalin Island. A familiar progression of attitudes towards the mining project is playing out in Kamchakta. Initial acceptance of the mine, mostly based on promises of economic benefits and employment opportunities, is now evolving into disappointment, as these benefits go largely unrealized and negative environmental impacts begin to occur.

INDIGENOUS CONCERNS AND STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS

- Kamchatka's Committee on Protection of the Environment and Natural Resources (KCPENR) was the regional government agency initially responsible for both permitting and monitoring the mining site. KCPENR was successful in voicing opposition to the mining development and including provisions for environmental considerations into the review of the initial EIS. However, in 2000, the Russian federal government changed responsibility for permitting and monitoring over to the Moscow-based Russian Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) (M. Jones, personal communication, March 10, 2007). The federal ministry admitted that the move was made to speed up the industrial development process. One ministry representative stated, "the balance will be shifted toward using these natural resources...the ministry's policy is that natural resources should be explored and exploited (Gordon, 1996)."

- The mine is situated in the headwaters of nine principal wild salmon spawning rivers, including the Icha and Kirganik Rivers. Construction of 120 kilometers of new roads to facilitate mining development has further exasperated the existing problem of salmon poaching (Southwest Research and Information Center, 2004). Increased poaching threatens the ability of indigenous peoples to earn a livelihood through alternate traditional means such as sustainable salmon fisheries. Additionally, the issue of salmon poaching has become divisive amongst indigenous peoples. Some are eager to engage in poaching for the immediate financial benefits, while others are concerned about the long-term health of the salmon fisheries.
- Physical distance is another significant obstacle to communication between the mining company and the indigenous peoples. The environmental impacts of the project have taken varying forms, ranging from the failure of a tailings pond liner resulting in a toxic release to a waterway, to development of new roads in the Icha River watershed and along the Kirganik River from the regional capital of Mil'kovo in Mil'kovskii Raion¹ (M. Jones, personal communication, March 10, 2007). These environmental impacts are felt not only in the closest two villages of Esso and Angavai, but throughout a wide geographic area, making organization and prioritization of indigenous concerns particularly challenging.
- Representing the indigenous community, the Russian Association for Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON) wrote a letter to regional officials and mine management in 2005, containing general language about cooperation and mutual interests between stakeholders. A later version of the letter expanded the content considerably to include very specific environmental protection and project management stipulations. It specifically called on mining officers to create mechanisms for indigenous community representatives, together with NGO representatives and agency personnel, to visit the mines. The letter also called for development of a formal dialogue regarding the “establishment of access to information relating to mine operations (Jones, 2005).” Although KAMGOLD previously agreed to discuss a ‘good neighbor agreement’, this revised draft is still a draft today. The company has not shown any interest in negotiating a mutually acceptable version of the agreement or in offering a different version for consideration by the indigenous community (M. Jones, personal communication, March 10, 2007).
- KAMGOLD failed to attend an important technical exchange that occurred in July, 2004 between Pacific Environment, the Kamchatka League of Independent Experts (KLIE), and the MNR². Indigenous representatives were not part of this exchange (Southwest Research and Information Center, 2004).

¹ A *Raion* is an administrative subdivision of a Russian province, most closely translated as a district.

² KAMGOLD agreed to plan a site visit during this exchange, but instead called to explain that they would not be able to host exchange participants at the mine site because senior mine staff were unavailable.

- KAMGOLD has failed to provide closure and reclamation plans, and failed to commit to financial guarantees that could insure reclamation after closure. Additionally, the \$1 M budget of the MNR appears to be grossly inadequate for proper monitoring and assessment of the environmental impacts of the mine over its expected seven year lifetime. Finally, KAMGOLD has been unwilling to allow independent observers into the mine site³ (Southwest Research and Information Center, 2004).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Stakeholders should carefully examine the process of indigenous resistance on both Sakhalin Island and in Magadan Province. The Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), the Arctic Network for the Support of the Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Arctic (ANSIPRA), and the KLIE could play an important role in this information sharing process. The participatory process at Magadan in particular could be replicated with help from the partnering environmental organizations, Pacific Environment, the Southwest Research and Information Center (SRIC), and the Magadan Center for the Environment (MACE). The program, “Expanding Citizens’ Use of Environmental Rights in Magadan Oblast” documented successes in improving communication between stakeholders and increasing access to information for indigenous peoples and the general public (Foundation for Russian-American Economic Cooperation, 2005) .
- The indigenous peoples living in the villages of Esso and Anagvai would likely benefit from collaboration with the Union of Kamchadals in the neighboring city of Tigil. This indigenous group is attempting to diversify the local economy by developing a sustainable salmon fisheries industry as a long-term solution to economic development. The group also works with local government officials to monitor waterways for poachers. They may be able to assist the Esso and Anagvai communities to setup a monitoring program and to determine the economic value of this alternative industry. This could feasibly be pursued in conjunction with current mining development.
- KAMGOLD should respond in writing to the impact-benefit agreement proposed by RAIPON. Information on the design and construction of tailings dams, remediation and closure plans, and data from environmental assessments, should be provided by KAMGOLD to the members of the technical exchange group and to RAIPON specialists for review of compliance with international technical standards. This information should be provided directly to the recipients, rather than being available only at company locations. The MNR should play a stronger role in demanding the release and delivery of this information.

³ KAMGOLD eventually agreed to allow participants of the 2004 technical exchange to accompany MNR hunting and fishing inspectors to field sites located along the new road. However, when the group arrived, a new gate was constructed, locked, and guarded by KAMGOLD and local police, blocking access to the supposedly “public” road. Two additional attempts were made to enter the gate at later times but these were also unsuccessful.

- The technical exchange committee should be expanded to include representatives from Esso, Anagvai, and other interested and/or affected indigenous communities. If necessary, KLIE could provide training for these representatives. As an added benefit, participation in this committee would provide an opportunity for information to be exchanged between communities that may be otherwise isolated.
- NGOs such as Pacific Environment should continue to expand assistance to the indigenous community, potentially providing transportation for representatives to and from important stakeholder meetings, and supporting mechanisms for communication between remote villages.
- KAMGOLD should allow outside observers to visit the mine site, including areas under construction. The technical exchange committee should continue to push for these visits even if previous attempts have been unsuccessful. RAIPON, ANSIPRA and other stakeholders may help to put additional pressure on KAMGOLD if necessary.

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APPENDIX A

Project Background

The following is an excerpt from *Voices of the Earth, Vol.5*, an online publication of the Southwest Research and Information Center:

Kamchatka is an ecologically and cultural rich peninsula the size of the State of California in the Russian Far East. It is the home of the "Volcanoes of Kamchatka" World Heritage site, made up of five major parks. It is also home to the region's largest surviving indigenous communities at Esso and Anavgai in the Bystrinsky Nature Park. Another benefit of Kamchatka's isolation is protection for populations of chum, sockeye, chinook, coho and pink salmon, which return by the millions to spawn in Kamchatka's rivers.

Sadly, these unique, world-class resources are at risk due to poorly controlled road building, mining, timber extraction and poaching. Efforts to contain or eliminate these risks are a major focus of Kamchatka-based groups including the Kamchatka League of Independent Experts (KLIE), and the Bystrinsky Nature Park staff. International non-governmental organizations such as Pacific Environment (PE) and the Wild Salmon Center are also working with the Kamchatka groups to preserve this region.

The Even Indigenous Peoples

Self-designation (singular, ISO spelling): èven

Official names (plural): Russ.: эвены; Engl.: Evens

Other names (plural): Lamuts

Residence area(s): Wide-spread in N Khabarovskiy Kray, Magadanskaya Obl., Kamchatka, Koryakskiy and W Chukotskiy avt. okrugs, N and E Yakutia

Population numbers (1989):

Former Soviet Union: 17,199, Russian Federation: 17,055, Sakha Republic (Yakutia): 8668, Chukotskiy Avt. Okrug: 1336, Magadanskaya Oblast: 2433, Kamchatskaya Oblast (incl.

Koryakskiy AO): 1485, Khabarovskiy Kray: 1919

Population number (2002): 19,242

Rural population (% in R.F.): 75,0%

National language:

Even: western, central and eastern dialect groups; writing based on Olsk dialect; also wide-spread: Yakut

Affiliation of national language: Altaic family, Tungus-Manchurian group

Status of national language (1989): Mother tongue: 43.8%; speaking fluently: 46,0%

Traditional culture:

Traditionally: semi-nomadic, combination subsistence, mainly reindeer-hunters, small-scale reindeer breeding; hunting. A small group, which mingled with the Koryaks, has maintained sea mammal hunting. Today: settled and semi-nomadic.

Ethno-geography:

The Evens are the second largest group of Tungus speaking peoples in the Russian North. Their wide-spread residence areas, in many places mingled with other native peoples (Yakuts, Chukchi, Koryaks, Yukagirs), were a hindrance for the establishment of a national, later autonomous, okrug. Wide-spread settling in ethnically mixed areas also explains the low preservation of their national language.

About half of the Even population live in north-eastern Yakutiya as a scattered minority. The remaining Evens live in the western Chukotskiy and Koryakskiy Avtonomnyy Okrug, and also in the Magadanskaya Oblast and northern part of the Khabarovskiy Kray; a small colony exists in central Kamchatka.

Lifestyle and subsistence of rural population:

The Even subsistence culture is traditionally a semi-nomadic reindeer breeder culture with small herds (a few dozens of animals) and hunting. Small-scale reindeer breeding is the basic occupation of Evens in the interior land areas and in northern Siberia. Reindeer were used for transportation. During the long journeys reindeer were ridden during hunting fur animals and on summer trips to the rivers for fishing. Nomadism was crucial for the Even breeding culture. Since Soviet collectivisation started in the 1930s, nomads were forced to settle and experienced a subsequent dissolution of their social pattern and cultural identity. Modern trends to revive nomadism as well as the associated subsistence pattern and social structure are pursued. Even reindeers are known to be large, strong and persevering. They are traditionally used for both riding and transportation of cargo. Modern transportation has only partly substituted the reindeer. Dog sledges are used in the eastern areas, where Evens have close contact with Koryak and Chukchi breeders. For housing on hunting or herding trips, traditional chums, leaf and wooden huts and modern tents are used. Hunting is an important occupation. Hunted animals are mainly wild reindeer and mountain sheep, but also fur animals, particularly squirrels. Even hunting dogs have famous qualities.

River fishing is an important traditional subsistence, and has modern industrial application.

Valuable fish are white salmon (*Stenodus leucichthus nelma*), sturgeon (*Acipenser baeri*), omul (*Coregonus autumnalis*), muksun (*Coregonus muksun*) and Siberian cisco (*Coregonus sardinella*).

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Cattle breeding and agriculture have been introduced in southern areas. Fishing in river mouths (humpback salmon and dog salmon) and seal hunting is common among the Evens at the Sea of Okhotsk. The coastal Evens are sedentary, living in log cabins (uran). Traditional earth huts (utan) were used in the past. Dog sledges were common for inland transportation

The above text is an excerpt from the (Arctic Network for the Support of the Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Arctic (ANSIPRA), 2007).