

GAPS: The Impacts of Oil and Gas Activity on Peoples in the Arctic

Oil and gas exploration that is coming to Canada's North may bring benefits such as previously unheard of wealth to local communities, but it will also present new challenges to community infrastructure and traditional livelihoods.



Fort Good Hope

But how do you assess the pros and cons of increased development? That's where *GAPS: The Impacts of Oil and Gas Activity on People in the Arctic Using a Multiple Securities Perspective*, comes into play. As its name suggests, the project is using a comprehensive and holistic approach to try to come up with some of the answers. We are giving particular priority to the human security framework.

Human security is achieved when individuals and communities have the freedom to identify risks and threats to their well-being and the ability to determine ways to end, reduce or adapt to those risks and threats. Furthermore, this project takes into consideration the cumulative effects of oil and gas development and climate change. The purpose is to identify and document risks and survival strategies through the participation and collaboration of Arctic communities, and to share these insights with other Arctic communities as well as with other researchers.

By exploring the effects of oil and gas activity, and its connections with climate change, on the human security of Arctic peoples, *GAPS* will improve our knowledge and understanding of 1) the science of climate change impacts and adaptation, and 2) the health and well-being of Northern communities.

A diverse team of researchers, ranging from natural scientists to social scientists, are looking at a number of issues related to development. The research is multi-national and multi-disciplinary. In addition to work in Canada (in the Yukon Territory, the Northwest Territories, and the Nunavut Territory), the Canadian researcher team is collaborating with researchers from Norway and Russia. To date we have engaged in consultations with community members and other stakeholders in many Arctic communities, including Tuktoyaktuk, Old Crow, Whitehorse, Fort Simpson, Fort Good Hope, Norman Wells, Inuvik and Yellowknife. The project has also placed a particular focus on developing opportunities to engage and work with northern youth.



Inuvik

The project is divided into six integrated sub-projects covering the scopes of environmental, health, political, economic, cultural, and social security. The sub-projects include an examination of:

- the link between substance use and resource extraction activities in the Northwest Territories, and the implications for health and social services
- the relationship between housing insecurity and homelessness and oil and gas development in the Northwest Territories
- invasive (non-native) species and how pipelines, such as the proposed Mackenzie Gas Pipeline Project, change ecosystems by allowing new species to enter an area or where existing species grow. In addition, as the climate warms, species could move northward, altering the way local ecosystems function. Endophytes, or plants that live within other plants (often parasitically), are a special focus of this sub-project, specifically toxic fungi living in forage grasses which are important to caribou and other northern grazers.
- the effects of oil and gas development projects on the economic development of the Arctic, including any effects on land claim settlements.

The GAPS project combines traditional academic-based fieldwork, and has aimed to link this

knowledge with the knowledge of community members. In linking local knowledge with academic information, our goal is to assist northern communities in developing responsive strategies to the short and longer term effects of oil and gas development. We will be reporting back to local communities where we did community consultation and field work over the next year.

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On February 25th 2009, the IPY Joint Committee will release a report on 'The State of Polar Research'. In the lead-up to this event, major IPY research projects are releasing information for the press, and making themselves available for media enquiries. A wide range of projects will be profiled reflecting the diversity of IPY. For more information, please visit

http://www.ipy.org/index.php?ipy/detail/feb09_projects/