

Research Project: CSR and Accountability in Key Contexts – Resource Exploitation: Corporations and Communities.

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Background: Societal demand for resources, and energy in particular, can lead to conflicts between businesses with an interest in the extraction and transportation of resources, and communities potentially impacted by these processes. Issues relating to mineral extraction are covered by BRASS work on mining (see A42), but another research project focussed on the potential for conflicts between businesses and communities linked to the construction and operation of oil and gas pipelines and windfarms.

Aims and objectives: This project aimed to:

- Explore issues of stakeholder relationship management in relation to energy infrastructure projects, particularly in terms of local communities' experiences of the resulting positive and negative impacts, and of the planning processes relating to such development;
- Understand what governance tools and models can be applied to promote sustainability and ensure the productive involvement of communities residing in the area of energy infrastructure projects.
- Identify elements of good practice in developing community participation and the main determinants of better quality outcomes, and from this to develop a framework in which to explore how infrastructure impacts on the services flowing from the natural environment to local and/or indigenous people.

About the research: The project involved two aspects of energy infrastructure, oil and gas pipelines and wind farms. The oil and gas pipeline element of the work contrasted case studies of two very different pipeline developments – the construction of the oil-pipe line "East Siberia-Pacific Ocean" in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Russian Federation and the construction and operation of the liquid natural gas pipeline in West Wales, UK. These case studies offer a means of comparing the impacts of related activities in very different socio-economic, political, planning and cultural circumstances. Each case was based around a review of the literature as the basis to develop a programme of in-depth interviews with selected stakeholders of the major infrastructure projects. Amongst the major stakeholders in the context of infrastructure and resource exploitation projects are corporations, government agencies, community, community organisations and other non-governmental organisations.

Results and outputs:

The research examining the implications of an oil pipeline development in Eastern Siberia on the Evenki community in the Aldan district of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) revealed a number of policy failures in the protection of traditional natural resource use of indigenous peoples and provision of benefits with regards to the extractive sector that leave indigenous peoples marginalised in the process of development. There is a need to involve indigenous peoples on the basis of dialogue and partnership, improve regulation and shift industry's approach towards consideration and engagement. The oil and gas pipeline based research also demonstrated the tensions between participatory governance and recentralisation in terms of the relationship between energy privatisation and energy infrastructure planning. Experience from the South Wales Gas Pipeline confirmed arguments that siting conflicts often centre on broader policy issues as much as local concerns. The research showed that the neoliberal recentralisation of some governance functions exacerbates such conflicts, making it necessary to find new ways to secure effective participation.

For the wind farm research, the results showed that rural wind generation projects in Wales had produced limited economic benefits for local communities, and that although developers of wind farms routinely provide diverse forms of community benefits to ‘affected communities’ these have yet to evolve into significant tools of economic development. The flows of revenues from community benefits are dwarfed, in quantitative terms, by the revenue streams that might be channelled to rural areas through a broader community ownership of wind energy projects. The research also revealed that the provision of community benefits can shift in significance depending on whether or not the ‘affected community’ has any significant influence over wind farm projects. Community benefits are seen predominantly as compensation for impacts, without any clear implication that they should change social attitudes towards windfarm development. The dominant, instrumental rationale for community benefits of promoting planning system acceptance obscures other, equally important justifications: the role of community benefits in promoting environmental justice; and how flows of community benefits might better serve the long-term sustainability of wind farm development areas.

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Impacts achieved/potential for impact:

The siting of energy infrastructure, and windfarms in particular, is a very current and contentious issue in the UK. The BRASS work has contributed some important empirical evidence into the debate about windfarms and stakeholder benefits. The BRASS pipeline report was translated into Russian for the benefit of Russian communities and stakeholders, and BRASS also submitted a report to the European Parliament examining the implications of gas pipelines.