

Action Plan for Indigenous Peoples in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region  
2009-2012



Working Group of Indigenous Peoples in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (WGIP)

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## CONTENTS

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <u>PREFACE</u>  | <u>3</u>  |
| PART I  |           |
| <u>1. INTRODUCTION</u>  | <u>4</u>  |
| <u>1.1 Background</u>   | <u>4</u>  |
| <u>1.1.1 The Barents cooperation</u>                            | <u>4</u>  |
| <u>1.1.2 WGIP and BIPO</u>                                      | <u>4</u>  |
| <u>1.1.3 Indigenous Peoples in the BEAR</u>                     | <u>4</u>  |
| <u>1.1.4 Natural resources</u>                                  | <u>5</u>  |
| <u>1.1.5 Distinct challenges</u>                                | <u>5</u>  |
| <u>1.2 Implementation and responsibilities</u>                  | <u>6</u>  |
| <br>  |           |
| <u>2. COOPERATION BETWEEN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES</u>                | <u>7</u>  |
| <u>2.1 The indigenous peoples' dimension</u>                    | <u>7</u>  |
| <u>2.2 Indigenous peoples' rights</u>                           | <u>7</u>  |
| <br>  |           |
| <u>3. GOALS</u>   | <u>8</u>  |
| <u>3.1 Main goals</u>   | <u>8</u>  |
| <u>3.2 Interim goals</u>  | <u>8</u>  |
| <br>  |           |
| <u>4. GENERAL CONDITIONS</u>                                    | <u>10</u> |
| <u>4.1 International Rights of Indigenous Peoples</u>           | <u>10</u> |
| <u>4.2 International cooperation between Indigenous Peoples</u> | <u>10</u> |
| <u>4.3 EU, the Nordic countries and the Arctic</u>              | <u>10</u> |
| <u>4.4 The Barents Euro-Arctic Council</u>                      | <u>10</u> |
| <br>  |           |
| PART II   |           |
| <u>5. PRIORITISED AREAS AND MEASURES</u>                        | <u>11</u> |
| <u>5.1 Background</u>   | <u>11</u> |
| <u>5.2 Geographical limitation</u>                              | <u>11</u> |
| <u>5.3 Prioritised areas and proposed measures</u>              | <u>11</u> |
| <u>5.3.1 Business development</u>                               | <u>11</u> |
| <u>5.3.2 Language and media</u>                                 | <u>12</u> |
| <u>5.3.3 Health and social related issues</u>                   | <u>12</u> |
| <u>5.3.4 Environment</u>  | <u>13</u> |
| <u>5.3.5 Culture</u>  | <u>14</u> |
| <u>5.3.6 Political cooperation</u>                              | <u>14</u> |
| <u>5.4 Economy</u>  | <u>15</u> |

## PREFACE

The Action Plan for Indigenous Peoples in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (hereinafter BEAR) 2009-2012 contains proposed measures and projects aiming at development of the indigenous peoples' communities and societies within the BEAR. The measures are focused on Nenets, Vepsian and Saami areas on the Russian side of the BEAR. The Action Plan promotes measures within the fields of development of trade and business, language and media, health and social related issues, environment and culture.

This document also describes the goals and principles, of which the foundation for the proposals is made, as well as the current situation for the indigenous peoples of the region.

## PART I

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

##### 1.1.1 The Barents Cooperation

The Barents cooperation (the cooperation between the states in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region – BEAR) was established January 11<sup>th</sup> 1993. Representatives for Norway, Sweden, the Russian Federation, Finland, Iceland, Denmark, the European Commission and the Nordic Saami Council signed the Kirkenes Declaration. This document, together with the Jubilee Declaration of 2003, sets the framework, the structure and the official goals for the cooperation.

Territorially speaking, the cooperation includes the thirteen regions Nordland Fylke, Troms Fylke, Finnmark Fylke (Norway), Västerbotten Län, Norrbotten Län (Sweden), Kainuu, Oulu, Lapland (Finland), Murmansk Oblast, the Republic of Karelia, Arkhangelsk Oblast, Nenets Autonomous Okrug and the Republic of Komi (Russian Federation).

##### 1.1.2 WGIP and BIPO

The Working Group of Indigenous Peoples in the BEAR (WGIP) is appointed by the Barents Regional Council and was established on a permanent basis in 1995. WGIP has an advisory status towards the Barents Regional Council and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC). By this, the WGIP has a particular political dimension within the formal structure of the Barents cooperation. The representatives from Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian side are appointed by the Saami Parliamentary Council for a four-year period. The representatives for the Saami, the Nenets and the Veps on the Russian side are appointed for a three-year period after proposals from their own organisations (The Saami Representative Council of Murmansk Oblast, Yasavey, and Vepsian Cultural society).

The Barents Indigenous Peoples' Office (hereinafter referred to as BIPO) was established in 2003. The office is financed by the Saami Parliament on the Norwegian side and it is administrated by the Norwegian Barents Secretariat. BIPO was moved from Murmansk city to Lovozero in 2007 and is the secretariat for the WGIP on the Russian side. BIPO is also a service- and information tool for partners and participants within the indigenous peoples' cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

The adviser on indigenous peoples at the Norwegian Barents Secretariat shares the secretarial function with BIPO and is responsible for the WGIP activities on the Norwegian side.

##### 1.1.3 Indigenous Peoples in the BEAR

Nenets, Vepsians and Saami are the indigenous peoples of the region, with ancient traditions for habitation, and traditions for usage of the areas' resources in a trade context from the times before the national states were established. The indigenous peoples are characterized

by own languages, own cultures and own traditions for trade and society. The Komi people have the status as an indigenous people within the Republic of Komi, but they are not recognized as “indigenous people small in number” according to federal legislation. Karelians and Pomors are other minorities living in the region.

In the Kirkenes Declaration of 1993, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs emphasized their support for their indigenous peoples’ rights in the north, in accordance with the goals of chapter 26 in Indigenous Peoples’ Agenda 21.

The WGIP mandate for the development of an Action Plan for Indigenous Peoples in the BEAR is recognized through the appointing of the Working Groups in 1993. The present Action Plan replaces the Action Plan for Indigenous Peoples 2005-2008. The main focus is on the indigenous communities on the Russian side, in addition to further development of an extended multilateral cooperation between indigenous peoples in the BEAR.

#### 1.1.4 Natural resources

The cultural landscapes of the indigenous peoples are often considered as wilderness with development potential by others. This leads to i.e. conflicts of interest which directly affect the livelihoods of indigenous peoples. The indigenous peoples’ communities are marked by challenges attached to living standard, welfare, decline in public health- and social services, as well as serious problems with maintenance of traditional and necessary access to the natural resources.

The market economy and increased external access to – and exploitation of - natural resources, bring increased pressure on the renewable and non-renewable values. Traditional competence is not transferred to future generations due to lack of resources within elementary fields of society. Altogether, this constitutes a serious threat to indigenous peoples’ livelihoods, culture, communities and further existence.

#### 1.1.5 Distinct challenges

The situation of the indigenous peoples brings particular challenges for the Barents cooperation, and demands particular measures and priorities. The Action Plan for Indigenous Peoples will promote the special needs and interests of the indigenous peoples. The ambition is that the indigenous peoples, through the program work, will set the premises themselves and develop a policy for development in their own living areas and local communities in a long-term perspective.

The WGIP focuses on the possibilities within the BEAR, as well as use of existing resources, and WGIP considers the population as the most important resource. The indigenous way of trade, languages, identity and cultural background of the indigenous peoples, together with a cooperation based on equality between partners, make the foundation of the development of the BEAR.

The proposals are primarily meant to create alternative solutions for Saami, Nenets and Vepsians on the Russian side, with reference to the governmental moving- and

rationalisation projects initiated by Russian state authorities in the late 90s. The moving measures gave individuals and families the opportunity to move back to their original home areas, but these measures are not adapted to the needs and interests of the indigenous peoples. As the indigenous peoples seldom are immigrants in their own areas of residence, the desire to move is replaced by the desire for improvement of living standard and possibilities within their community.

## 1.2 Implementation and responsibility

The Action Plan for Indigenous Peoples in the BEAR is promoted towards the central and the regional level within the Barents cooperation, according to the mandate, status and field of responsibility of the WGIP. The plan constitutes the foundation for the follow-up connected to the high priority set by the governments for different measures of cooperation towards North West Russia, and the Barents Programme at the regional level. This requires a solid coordination of measures and projects.

The Action Plan for Indigenous Peoples supplements the other work executed on the central, regional and local level. WGIP and the other partners within the BEAR share the responsibility for implementation of regional measures aimed at indigenous peoples, as well as the joint responsibility for conduct of the interests of the indigenous peoples. This means that each level in the cooperation shall initiate and implement indigenous peoples' projects within their administrative framework.

Single measures might be aimed at concrete areas of habitation, but in a wider perspective, the measures cover all of the area's population.

The plan is constantly evaluated by the WGIP. Priorities and measures will happen in accordance with the current status each year. Reporting and description of upcoming activities happen through the annual reports and activity plans of the WGIP. This way, the plan has a dynamic nature, taking conduct of new needs and creating an overview of the efforts within the field of indigenous peoples, and it facilitates the long-term planning.

## 2. COOPERATION BETWEEN INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

### 2.1 The indigenous peoples' dimension

There is an interior and an outward perspective within the indigenous peoples' dimension of the work. The interior perspective comprises the cooperation between the indigenous peoples. The relationship between the indigenous peoples and the state, regional and local authorities constitutes the outward perspective. Both perspectives must be further developed and taken into consideration in order to succeed with this work.

The indigenous peoples define their areas as central areas, with a particular need for specific regional and social measures. Indigenous peoples' transnational character represents a considerable challenge in this context. This means that the framing of politics, which affect indigenous peoples, must also contain a perspective relating to foreign politics.

### 2.2 Rights of the indigenous peoples

Indigenous peoples' work for their rights is about equality and acceptance. What is natural and reasonable for other peoples, must also be natural and reasonable for indigenous peoples. The existence of the Nenets, the Saami and the Vepsians are attached to this specific region. Their way of living, their culture and languages have historical roots in the area, and future development of the region must take this into account. Negative trends of the development of indigenous peoples' communities must be handled with measures to correct these.

Clarification and protection of indigenous peoples' rights to the land, water and belonging natural resources within their own areas, is a central aim for the future work of indigenous peoples. Questions regarding rights are important in order to preserve the indigenous peoples' areas for the future generations. Petroleum- and mining activities are important sources of income and employment, but the activities also have negative impacts on the original population of the areas. Land-based activities are established on pastures and other areas of important use to the indigenous peoples, and the marine extraction happens on fishing areas, and these activities often lead to conflicts.

International corporations and large monetary interests must have the mentioned facts as a starting point in their planning of new and extended activity in the areas of indigenous peoples. The foundation for the indigenous peoples' own business activities and cultural exercise shall not be diminished by industrial activities or planned actions.

### 3. GOALS

#### 3.1 Main goals

The overall goal for the indigenous peoples' cooperation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region is to secure indigenous peoples' rights, foundation for trade, society, culture and language through implementation of the Action Plan of Indigenous Peoples of the BEAR. The indigenous peoples' cooperation shall contribute to friendship and cooperation based on equality, co-existence and tolerance between the peoples of the region. In the light of Nenets, Saami and Veps' status as indigenous peoples of the north, the cooperation shall secure solid health- and living conditions, as well as cultural continuity, in the future.

#### 3.2 Interim goals

- to obtain satisfying influence on issues with impact on the indigenous peoples and their areas
- to develop strong and healthy local communities with well-developed health-and welfare services, work places and satisfying school-and education possibilities
- to secure a solid material foundation for the cultural exercise of the indigenous peoples
- to establish solid conditions for the growth and development of indigenous peoples' languages
- to implement measures and projects aimed at indigenous women and families
- to secure solid conditions for further transmission and usage of indigenous peoples knowledge and competence
- to secure solid conditions for development of necessary indigenous peoples' institutions
- to spread correct information in order to increase the understanding of indigenous peoples' cultural, economic and social situation
- indigenous institutions and indigenous organizations are entitled to prior information and consultation regarding statistical data, measures and interventions in indigenous peoples' areas

## 4. GENERAL CONDITIONS

### 4.1 International rights of indigenous peoples

Parts of the states in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region are established on indigenous peoples' areas. Through this fact are the indigenous peoples, as peoples, entitled to recognition of the right to determination over their own culture, communities and areas. However, there are distinctions among the member states concerning ratification of international conventions regarding indigenous peoples, and transmission of these to national legislations.

A successful implementation of the Action Plan depends on adaptation of general framework conditions regarding indigenous peoples' situation. The cooperation between indigenous peoples in the BEAR must be seen in connection with the international ongoing processes on the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities. Internal and national legislation in each state must adapt to international decisions. An important point is the rights of indigenous peoples to natural resources as a material foundation for their culture.

A main aim for the preservation of indigenous peoples' rights is to implement the principles of the Rio Conference (UNCED 1992) and the principles of the ILO Convention No. 169 (on indigenous peoples and tribal peoples in independent states). The UN Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (of 1966), mentioning minorities in independent states, is another important international agreement with large importance for indigenous peoples. Further, there is the UN Convention on Biodiversity of 1993. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the General Assembly in September 2007.

UN General Assembly has, by declaring the period of 1995-2004 as International Decade of Indigenous Peoples, expressed will of raising indigenous peoples' issues on the international agenda and, by declaring the period of 2005-2014 as following International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples, acknowledged that implementation of measures aimed at indigenous peoples is time-consuming. The UN member states are, through the Decade, obliged to put efforts into the work of improving the living conditions of the indigenous peoples. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples also challenges the indigenous peoples on adding a concrete and focused content to the Decade.

It is a challenge for the member states of the BEAC to frame a corresponding policy on indigenous peoples, in which the principles of the peoples' right to self-determination are followed. The UN Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples is an excellent opportunity to strive for such harmonisation. It is essential to point out that planned and executed measures and projects in the indigenous peoples' areas, must not be characterized as aid or missionary work towards indigenous peoples. Conditions must be facilitated so that the population participates actively.

### 4.2 International cooperation between indigenous peoples

The success of the Action Plan implementation depends on a solid cooperation between different partners/institutions. Yasavey (Public Association of the Nenets People in the NAO), the Vepsian Culture Society, OOSMO (Official Organisation of Saami in Murmansk Oblast)

and Kola Saami Association are central partners on the Russian side, next to RAIPON (Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East).

The Saami Council, consisting of members from all four national states, is central in the cooperation. It is important to connect the border-crossing work on indigenous peoples' issues to the general work on indigenous peoples' issues on the Russian side. Further, it is important to coordinate the cooperation in accordance to activities initiated by the Arctic Council. The coordination must be executed by the state level.

Existing Saami parliaments within the Nordic states must follow up the work on establishment of an elected Saami parliament in the Russian side. In a future perspective, the strengthening of Saami Parliamentary Council, as well as the establishment of a joint Saami Convention between Finland, Norway and Sweden will create a foundation and framework for the future work on indigenous peoples' issues in the BEAR. A future objective must be a joint cooperation between the four member states, based on the foundation of the Nordic Saami Convention. The WGIP emphasizes the importance of transferring information regarding the work on the Nordic Saami Convention to the indigenous peoples on the Russian side.

The indigenous peoples are collectively prepared to accept the following obligations, by promoting own initiatives towards the member states of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. The present Action Plan is a contribution in this context. It is the responsibility of the national states to facilitate the follow-up of the initiatives promoted by indigenous peoples.

#### 4.3 The EU, the Nordic countries and the Arctic

The development in the indigenous peoples' areas in the BEAR must also be seen in a Nordic, an Arctic and a European perspective. Planned measures and programmes must be coordinated and implemented, and the initiatives promoted through the Arctic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers should be coordinated with the actions taken within the Barents cooperation. In addition, there is potential in the work executed by the European Union, as the Northern Dimension has a certain focus on indigenous peoples' issues and direct cooperation between people.

The WGIP views coordination of the international cooperation between indigenous peoples in the Arctic and the BEAR as crucial, and will follow the work of the Arctic Council.

#### 4.4 The Barents Euro-Arctic Council

WGIP and the indigenous peoples of the region still claims for a strengthened representation of indigenous peoples within the formal structures of the Barents cooperation, although the WGIP has a particular status towards the Barents Regional Council and the BEAC.

The WGIP will establish the Barents Indigenous Peoples' Congress, which will gather indigenous politicians from the BEAR for discussions about approaches and challenges concerning the indigenous peoples of the region. The Congress' mandate will be to take a position in the question about representation of the indigenous peoples within the formal structures of the Barents cooperation.

## PART II

### 5. PRIORITISED AREAS AND MEASURES

#### 5.1 Background

Mutual cooperation between equal partners is the starting point for the work on indigenous peoples' issues in the BEAR. The ambition is to develop more multilateral projects with participation from most of the cooperating states. Municipality cooperation, institutions and organisations, as well as official bodies, are important pieces in this context.

The dimension of indigenous peoples in the Barents cooperation, and measures aimed at indigenous peoples' communities bring positive consequences for the remaining population as well. Certain existing conflicts might be erased through visualisation of the diversity in the indigenous peoples' communities.

#### 5.2 Geographical limitation

The cooperation between indigenous peoples in the BEAR includes Nenets, Vepsian and Saami areas of living on the Russian side of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region.

#### 5.3 Prioritised areas and proposed measures

##### 5.3.1 Business development

Indigenous peoples' participation in business development, as well as increased activity, is decisive for the survival of the indigenous peoples' communities. The population must have a framework for protection and development of their communities in a long-term perspective.

The economic development of the region must to a larger extent increase the participation of the indigenous peoples in the fields of protection and development of their own communities. Primary industries, such as fisheries, reindeer husbandry, catching and traditional handicraft are the ground pillars for the indigenous peoples' business activity. These industries constitute the foundation for further development of new and modern industries, such as tourism and production- and trade business based on local indigenous peoples' traditions. This depends on access to the nature and securing of quality through a clean and sustainable environment. Solid multilateral projects is a tool for value creation through processing of raw materials and trade in the global market. This might create the foundation for future business activity in indigenous peoples' communities.

Reindeer husbandry has a special position among indigenous peoples of the north and in particular among Saami and Nenets in the BEAR. Production and processing of reindeer meat and reindeer hides has a large potential on the Russian side, as the demand for reindeer meat increases and the global market wants access to raw materials for production. The restructuring of reindeer husbandry within the Russian Federation, and the establishment of *obshinas/communities* opens for increased export of raw materials.

Proposed measures:

- establishment of a business program for indigenous peoples in the BEAR, based on multilateral funding and organisation
- implementation of Indigenous Entrepreneurship – a multilateral entrepreneurship project aimed at indigenous peoples and indigenous youth in the BEAR
- preparation of an ethical Code of Conduct for industrial companies' activities in indigenous peoples' areas, according to obligations established in international law

### 5.3.2 Languages and media

Education is the key to transmission of indigenous languages. Research produces new knowledge, and this creates a ground for growth and development of indigenous peoples' communities. A satisfying level on indigenous peoples' educational institutions is a central point for further development of the competence level among indigenous peoples. Saami educational institutions possess a particular responsibility for development of indigenous peoples' languages – also in the Russian side. The Kildin Saami language – and other indigenous languages on the Russian side - is threatened. Teaching in Kildin Saami must be intensified both on elementary level and as adult education, in order for the language to have a real chance of survival.

The stream of information between indigenous peoples in the BEAR must be improved, but it also depends on external factors. Kola Saami Radio is no longer a project, but an independent enterprise based on financing through news production aimed for sale to cooperating Saami media stations in the Nordic countries. Transmissions in Saami must be further developed, but there is also a demand for expansion of transmissions in Russian, in order to reach other indigenous peoples in the region. An improved informational service will strengthen the cooperation between indigenous peoples, and another point is to include existing networks of indigenous media in the circumpolar area.

Proposed measures:

- establishment of a network of indigenous media within the circumpolar area, through further development of Kola Saami Radio, establishment of a Nenets radio station in Naryan-Mar, and cooperation with existing media stations in Greenland and Canada
- establishment and protection of language education in the indigenous peoples' language areas, through establishment of local language centres
- establishment and securing of scholarship arrangements for indigenous peoples in the Russian side wanting to study at Saami University College, the Saami Education Centre in Inari, through Centre for Sámi Studies at the University of Tromsø or other relevant institutions

### 5.3.3 Health and social related issues

The curative health service in areas populated by indigenous peoples in the Russian side is variant, and actually absent in certain areas, in particular in areas outside larger cities and towns. Lack of personnel and funds for maintenance of the services are among the reasons for this.

Parts of the indigenous population in the Russian side live nomadic lives, while others are resident in cities, towns and smaller villages and settlements. This leads to a varied need for health care among indigenous peoples in the Russian side. With that, it is important to secure a satisfying health service for the population as a whole, irrespective of residence. The largest challenge for mobile health care is definitely expenses connected to transport and equipment. The indigenous peoples inhabit areas with a imperfect infrastructure, and this presupposes use of extraordinary measures (such as helicopter).

Proposed measures:

- development and strengthening of mobile health service aimed at reindeer herders and their families in the tundra of both Murmansk Oblast and Nenets Autonomous Okrug
- development of an action plan for preventing and fighting substance abuse within indigenous communities
- establishment of projects aiming directly towards indigenous women and youth

#### 5.3.4 Environment and use of nature

Indigenous peoples are attached to the nature and usage of natural resources. Renewable resources in indigenous peoples' area have constituted the living conditions for indigenous peoples in the BEAR, and there is a close connection between nature, resources and habitation. That is why the areas of population can not be considered as wilderness or so-called untouched nature, but rather as areas of usage with an adjusted harvest of the natural resources as the regulating element.

The present increased selection of resources does not necessarily lead to development of the local communities and indigenous peoples' communities, but rather to problems of industrial, environmental and social kind. National and international corporations establish activities in the areas of the indigenous peoples without involving the local inhabitants and the users of the areas in a overall strategy. The regional administrations often prioritise development of central areas, and that leaves the indigenous population with next to nothing. It must be emphasized that it is the reindeer herders in the Nenets tundra who surrender land areas for petroleum activities, and the mining industry in the Kola Peninsula demand land areas from the Saami and Komi reindeer herders and fishermen.

The development of the north, and indigenous peoples' areas of usage and residence, must include a strategy with concrete prospects for the future, in order to secure sustainable societies when the industrial activities are finished. Protection of, as well as access to, areas of natural resources is decisive for the future of the indigenous peoples' cultures, which is an important part of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region and the global diversity.

Proposed measures:

- cleansing and improvement of the quality on drinking water in the areas of indigenous peoples' residence
- protection and documentation of indigenous peoples' usage of the areas
- cleansing and restoration of abandoned industrial and military areas

### 5.3.5 Culture

The habitation and culture of the indigenous peoples have been threatened by different national, regional and local efforts. Active assimilation policies have been executed towards the indigenous peoples of the region, with concrete measures aimed at destruction of expressions and symbols that characterizes the indigenous peoples' cultures. Indigenous peoples have, in certain areas, been forced to leave their home areas in favour of other areas that do not harmonise with their traditional way of living.

Indigenous peoples' cultures are closely attached to primary industries, the nature, their languages, traditions and history through solidarity, socialization and identity. Maintenance and development of the indigenous peoples' cultures must have an overall perspective including a focus on both society and individuals. Maintenance of cultural varieties within the region is a challenge, and culture does also include sports activities.

Proposed measures:

- establishment of scholarships and exchange agreements for the indigenous artists of the region
- establishment of scholarships or funding instruments for stimulation of indigenous sports activities
- support to meeting arenas for indigenous peoples, such as annual festivals, seminars, meeting and cultural exhibitions

### 5.3.6 Political cooperation

The indigenous peoples of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region share challenges attached to their livelihoods and the development of their communities. Indigenous peoples of the BEAR must take active part in the global indigenous peoples' cooperation. Transfer of knowledge and competence regarding political work and international legislation regarding indigenous peoples' rights is a priority of the WGIP during the Action Plan period.

Proposed measures:

- \* existing Saami parliaments must, through Saami Parliamentary Council, provide the necessary assistance regarding the establishment of an elected Saami political body in the Russian side
- \* establishment of Barents Indigenous Peoples' Congress as a forum for discussion and cooperation between indigenous politicians of the BEAR
- \* joint seminars and conferences on particular political issues

## 5.4 Economy

The measures of the Action Plan for Indigenous Peoples in the BEAR 2009-2012 include both concrete projects and proposals for further project development. Implementation of these measures depends on funding from national, regional and local authorities, as well as from Nordic, European and international financing instruments.