

BRIEFING NOTE #5: 12th JUNE 2017

FIELDWORK IN SOUTH GREENLAND



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In May 2017 we traveled to Qaqortoq and Narsaq, South Greenland to meet with locals and to learn about the aspirations and concerns of the residents regarding development of the area. These towns are close to two mining projects, respectively the [Tanbreez project](#) and the GME [Kvanebjerg project](#). We talked to people in the region about their perception of future prospects in relation to the mining projects as well as other opportunities for economic development.

In total we met with 17 persons including representatives of South Greenland municipality (*Kommune Kujalleq*), the mining industry, farming, tourism, other local businesses, education, culture, police, community services, a local NGO (*Urani Naamik! e. Uranium: No Thanks!*) and other members of the local community.

We found that although neither mine has yet proceeded beyond the exploration stage, the projects have already had a significant impact on the local communities. In particular, the prospect of the mining operations coupled with a protracted licensing (or rejection) process has created frustration and passivity amongst local residents. Both those in favour of the planned mining operations and those opposed are keen for a decision to be made or at least to be advised as to when they should expect a decision. The uncertainty makes it difficult to make future plans or investments in either complementary or potentially competing industries. This effect is more pronounced in Narsaq than in Qaqortoq.

Some participants reported that the mining projects have also disrupted social cohesion in the communities between those in favour and those opposed which makes it harder to work together on common objectives unrelated to the mines. There is a lack of confidence in the information presented by the mining companies and by some international NGOs and many residents felt that their needs and futures were being ignored by these powerful 'outside' actors. Some participants feel that their voices are not being heard, while practical barriers such as distance and timing of meetings, limited internet connectivity and challenges of digesting complex scientific information in English make it difficult to engage more in the process or obtain reliable information. While most people that we spoke to think that it is right for the Self-Government to have the final decision-making power, a number do not believe that local interests are sufficiently taken into account or that the decision-makers in Nuuk fully appreciate local conditions and concerns. They are not confident that the benefits would come to the towns that will bear

the social impacts of such large projects or the risk of environmental contamination.

We uncovered significant differences in attitudes and expectations between Qaqortoq and Narsaq. Some of these could be attributed to the difference in the mining plans - for example, whether or not uranium will be extracted. Opponents to the *Kvanefjeld* project object because of concerns about local impacts, such as environmental contamination, as well as on global grounds, such as doubts about the sustainability of nuclear energy and treatment of nuclear waste in destination countries or the risk of uranium's use in nuclear weapons. Some who object to the *Kvanefjeld* project are not necessarily against the *Tanbreez* project or mining in general. Other differences between the towns can be linked to social and economic differences. For example, Qaqortoq is the centre of the municipality, hosts the High School and has a relatively stable, educated and employed population while Narsaq is facing rapid depopulation with the most resource-rich families leaving the town to pursue work and education, leaving a high number of families with social problems. One major point of disagreement between the people we talked to in the two towns is largely unrelated to the mines, namely, the plan to build a new airport at Qaqortoq. The residents of Qaqortoq are unsurprisingly in favour but the residents of Narsaq we met expressed concerns that it will mean a depletion of services for them and increased ticket prices as the new runway will be too small for larger planes.

The *Tanbreez* project is an important consideration for residents of Qaqortoq, whether or not they support its development but it is not the most pressing issue for many residents. By contrast, the *Kvanefjeld* project in Narsaq dominated discussions about the town's future. Both advocates and detractors of the *Kvanefjeld* project considered it to be pivotal to Narsaq's future. Some people see it as crucial to saving a depopulating town by creating employment and business opportunities through the supply chain. Others see it as the last straw for a struggling town that would destroy agriculture, tourism and fisheries and force worried residents to leave owing to concerns regarding contamination.

We will follow-up this research with a visit to Tasiilaq in August this year and a trip to North Greenland in 2018 where we will talk to local people to gauge more opinions on the extractive industries place in Greenland's development strategy.