

### **Session 3. Environmental Cooperation Initiatives of Local Authorities**

## **The Integration of Efforts of the Regional Authorities and the Local Population and Their Governmental Support in Russia**

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The rising importance of the local environmental initiatives for the national and global sustainable development and recognition of this fact by the governments and international organizations is a common feature of the modern society. The World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 in Johannesburg and its follow-up processes have been significantly influenced by the different stakeholders initiatives.

In Russia it has been facilitated by the following factors:

1. The enhanced capacity of the different social groups in identifying their environmental interests and building partnership with governmental bodies and international organizations and financial institutions that is in turn the result of their involvement into the environmental project implementation.
2. The decentralization of the governmental functions in the environmental sphere.

The involvement of different stakeholders into the environmental protection activity is an implication of ideas of the sustainable development when the environmental objectives are integrated with a poverty reduction, social progress, etc. In practice it can be achieved through the institutional support and capacity building projects.

The integration of local initiatives and governmental measures in Russia in most cases has been achieved through the following stages:

1. First the non-governmental organizations or local communities upon their initiative launch the pilot projects. Sometimes they are based on the financial support of the international organization responsible for implementation of the global environmental conventions and agreements.

2. Inspired by the good output of the projects the regional administrations formulate the Plan of Actions in the follow-up of those projects, adhere the local legislation in accordance with an innovative practice of environmental protection activities prior to the federal acts.

3. Further on the competent federal body accumulates and assesses this experience to incorporate it into the national environmental strategies (for example, the Ecological Doctrine of Russian Federation) or federal programs (the Federal program "Ecology and Natural Resources").

Integration and coordination of local initiatives within the framework of the large-scale strategies under the governmental support provide their legislative and institutional base and facilitate the inflow of financial assistance.

Usually the "pilot projects" are of small scale in respect to territory size and number of involved participants and addressed to the objective of limited local significance.

"Model forests" project in the Komi Republic or Khabarovskiy krai is a good example. They proved their effectiveness at a pilot stage and further on have been developed into the administrative plan of actions.

There should be also mentioned the joint Russian-Japanese projects on forest management by local communities (participatory approach) in Siberia. They are supposed to be used by the Japanese part to offset the obligations of the Kyoto Protocol as joint implementation projects in future.

The most promising forms of the local population involvement are:

- participation in the forums, conferences and new institutional bodies (coordination committees) aimed at formulation and implementation of regional strategies of sustainable development (Local Agenda 21) or environmental challenges.
- participation in the environmental monitoring and nature management (eco-tourism, etc.).

The Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia renders support to the local environmental projects of international cooperation in the NEA region on bilateral and multilateral base.

The joint commissions of Russia on environmental protection with the NEA countries (Russian-Japanese Joint Commission on Environmental Protection, Russian-Chinese Working Group on Environmental Protection, Russian-Korean Joint Committee on Environmental Protection) have performed the inventory of bilateral local projects launched by regional administrations and local communities in the Russian Far East.

Those activities are:

*Implementation of the bilateral conventions on Migratory Birds protection (Russia-Japan, Russia-Republic of Korea)*

At the recent Russian-Japanese meeting on the Migratory Birds Convention (22-24 Oct., in Khabarovsk) there have been summarized the activities on joint project implementation, such as:

North East Asian Crane Site Network Workshop (1997), Amur Wetlands assessment (1998-1999), Census and banding of migratory songbirds (1997-2003), Ussury valley waterbird inventory (1999-2000), Amur down-stream waterbird survey (1999-2000), Fish owl study (2000-2002), Amur 2000: Oriental white stork and Amur wetland protection, etc.

As for these projects the federal and local administrative bodies provide major contribution through the management and support of existing nature protected areas and the wetland sites important as bird habitats, wintering sites and flyways and also the establishment of new protected territories. On the other side the involvement of citizens in this activity is also important mainly in the form of performing the census and banding of migratory birds along the flyways and monitoring the routes of their migration.

In this respect the arrangement of seminars and training courses with citizens, the publication and distribution of the project results, also atlases of bird species are the most efficient activities in respect of extension of participants contingent. The output of the projects is the Amur wetlands map, the inventory (cadaster) of wetlands, so on. The future output is the planned publication of the book - "Birds of the Amur".

In this respect we also welcome the idea of the NEA to launch project on environmental education on wetlands.

*Strategic Plan of Actions "TumenNET"*

The severe environmental threats in the estuary of the Tumen River made it necessary to introduce advanced mechanisms of biodiversity and transboundary waters protection and involvement of inhabitants of this region. To start the implementation of the Strategic Plan the establishment of the biosphere natural reserve in the lower river by efforts of three countries – China, Russia and North Korea is now under way. The participation of the local population in nature reserve planning activities is a compulsory component of the project.

*The Plan of Actions on the biodiversity Protection of the Baikal Region*

The principal output of the Baikal Component of this GEF project (1997-2002)

– the Plan of Actions of Baikal Region Biodiversity Protection that had been developed on “bottom-up” approach. The program of small-scale grants “Local Initiatives” encompassed more than 1,5 th. project proposals.

The Subjects of Federation have been coordinated through the Supervising Committee. The enormous number of participants has been integrated within the Baikalskaya Declaration.

The outputs of the project are: 1) protection of plant and animals species, 2) establishment of new nature protected areas, 3) rehabilitation of natural landscapes, 4) the rising environmental awareness, 5) new base data on plant and animal diversity prepared by local communities.

Under the support of the Japanese Government there has been produced the General Plan of the eco-tourism development in the Baikal region (1993-1995). The objective of the Plan – to define the admissible environmental load on the Baikal ecosystems.

*Strategic Plan of Actions on Amur Protection*

At present the environmental situation at the Middle and Low Amur is recognized as the most critical in the NEA region. The decline of drinking water quality and contamination of river fish stock is aggravating the social problems. It is now recognized by the international community that situation should be radically changed in the nearest future. The approval of the comprehensive Plan of actions covering a huge territory and based on fixed deadlines is urgent.

This year the government of the Khabarovskiy krai initiated the establishment of the Interregional committee encompassing the 6 Subjects of Federation adjacent to the Amur River basin with co-ordinative functions under support of the territorial bodies of the Ministry of Natural Resources RF. A notable contribution was from the NGO (especially the WWF)

This idea has received a support from international organizations (UNEP-GEF) as a large-scale project “The Comprehensive Management of the Amur River Basin” aimed at mitigation of environmental threats to the Transboundary River Amur. The project has two objectives – to develop the general management pattern and mechanisms of its implementation followed with a number of pilot projects and development of international cooperation model in the Khanka lake basin. The participants of the project – Russia, China and Mongolia. They are expected to make the equal conceptual contribution to the development of the new water basin management mechanisms.

Some of them have been already considered at the International Conference on the Environmental Problems in the NEA Region in Khabarovsk on 3-7<sup>th</sup> November.

The Russian part is actively developing the mechanisms of involvement of all stakeholders for implementation of Amur River Strategic Plan. A new concept of the Russian-Chinese cooperation - the “Green Belt” has been proposed upon the initiative of the NGO first of all the WWF and the local inhabitants. During a visit of the Chinese Minister on the Environment to Moscow on 11<sup>th</sup> August this year a presentation of this concept by the WWF was done in the Ministry of Natural Resources. The main idea of the concept – the establishment of network of the key nature protected areas equally by Russian and Chinese parts with different type of restriction on economic activity.

There has been established the Working Group of NGO and 8 subgroups. Just soon before the Conference in Khabarovsk there has been implemented the marathon campaign “Nature Reserve Wave”, the seminars have been held that resulted in the creation of “initiative groups”.

### The projects of the Northern Forum

Some regional authorities in the Russian Far East have an experience of participation in the international organization “Northern Forum”.

For example, Sakhalinskaya oblast (in cooperation with the territorial body of our Ministry) is an active participant and the initiator of a number of projects. The participation in the working groups on Environmental education and the Brown Bears protection has been appreciated highly. The future cooperation projects within this organization – “Eco-tourism in the North”, “Joint training on response measures in the extraordinary situations”, etc.

### The climate change projects

The climate change projects represent good opportunities for involvement of different stakeholders into the international cooperation. This type of activities has been actively developed in the NEA countries. The capacity of Russian organizations is not used at full extent.

The reason is that the national strategy providing the implementation of the national obligations of the Kyoto Protocol in Russia has not yet been developed. The official and non-formal organizations responsible for the cooperation between governmental, public and private sectors of Russia with those of other countries are still being developed.

In the course of the World Conference on Climate Change in Moscow (29 Sept-3<sup>rd</sup> Oct) the documents were formulated the documents on the consolidation of the civil society to prevent and mitigate the negative effects of the climate change.

A notable contribution in this respect has been done by the Russian Regional Environmental Center. It renders support to the ideas of the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership – REEEP of the WSSD and took part in its presentation.

The development of the renewable energy projects is crucial for Russia and its Far East regions rich in this type of energy and by far suffering a great shortage of energy supply.

Prior to the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol the Ministry of Natural Resources renders support to all types of the climate change projects in the framework of the Russian-Japanese Joint Environmental Commission – educational, forest, inventory projects (greenhouse gases sources and sinks), etc. that to a great extent need a support of citizens and local communities. A good opportunity in this respect is provided by a number of pilot projects on greenhouse gases inventories in separate regions of Russia.

We also find very promising the idea of establishing the capacity building centers on climate change in Russia on cooperation base with the NEA countries including their municipal organizations within the “Kitakyushu Initiative” framework.

Summarizing this presentation we want to propose the most important directions for cooperation of local authorities in the NEA region that are of mutual significance and boast good experience and institutional framework for cooperation activities:

- protection of the transboundary waters and their ecosystems;
- biodiversity protection (including all types of ecosystems);
- climate change projects;
- ecotourism;
- capacity building, etc.