

## 1.1 International partnership in development of a local community as a condition of the sustainable development of rural communities in the Russian North

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### Introduction

In 2009, the joint scientific-education project “Innovative Development of Northern Territories of Russia” was started by the Institute of Finance and Economics (IFE) of the Yakutsk State University named after M.K. Ammosov (currently North-Eastern Federal University (NEFU) named after M.K. Ammosov) in cooperation with the University of the Arctic’s Thematic Network on Local and Regional Development in the Circumpolar North (led by Tor Gjertsen, professor, Finnmark University College, Alta, Norway). The project was realized from 2009 to 2011 with funding from the federal analytical agency-level target program: “Development of scientific potential of higher education for 2009-2011” (project 2.2.2.1/1054).

The amount of funding during three years was about 4,800,000 rubles. In 2012-2014, the project was extended with funding by the Development Program of the NEFU named after M.K. Ammosov until 2019. Scientific adviser of the project in 2009-2012 was N.V. Okhlopkova, doctor of economics, professor, and in 2013-2014 the project is managed by O.D. Romanova, candidate of sociological sciences, professor of the IFE NEFU.

The main partners of the international project are the University of the Arctic’s Thematic Network on Local and Regional Development, Finnmark department of the Arctic University of Norway (Tromsø, Norway), University of Northern British Columbia (Prince George, Canada), University of Saskatchewan (Saskatoon, Canada), Saint Mary’s University (Halifax, Canada), University Centre of the Westfjords (Iceland). Regional partners include the Institute of Research in Humanities and in Problems of Indigenous People of the North of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Northern Forum Academy, and the Institute of Applied Ecology of the North.



### **2009-2011 International scientific-research project**

Innovative approaches to the socio-economic development of the northern regions of Russia are the research focus for the 2009-2011 international scientific-research project. Different aspects of the socio-economic development of northern territories of Russia are studied through comparative research analysis with the development of northern territories of Canada, Norway, Finland and other countries. During those years, scientific studies were undertaken in the following areas:

- specificity of northern territories development in Russia;
- evaluation of innovative and organizational potential of northern territories development;
- quality of life and social standards in the North;
- human resources potential of innovations;
- small business in the innovative process;
- development of tourism in northern territories;
- development model of local self-government of northern territories;
- climate change in the Arctic;
- development of human capital in the North;
- ethnocultural education of northern people;
- strategy for adaptation of Indigenous people of the North in conditions of globalization;
- and the role of social sector in organization of rural development.

A total of 12 doctors of science, and 21 candidates of science, PhD students and students participated in the international scientific-research project.

Within the framework of the 2009-2011 international scientific-research project, the sociological research project – “Problems of socio-economic development and innovative potential of municipalities of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia)” – was undertaken. The geographic focus of this research project was the rural municipalities of Yakutia. The subject focus of the research was the innovative potential of development within these rural municipalities. Purpose of the research was to define the main problems limiting socio-economic development and to identify innovative potential solutions to support sustainable socio-economic development of the rural municipalities of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia).



To date, more than 2000 people have been part of the sociological research project. The sample framework for the project included rural municipalities of the northern regions, including the industrial regions (Aldan, Nerungri, Mirniy, Ust-Maya) and the agricultural regions (Olenek, Churapcha, Megino-Kangalasskiy, Namskiy, Khangalasskiy).

### **Challenges to Rural and Small Village Socio-economic Development**

The research used statistical documents that reflect the economic development of the rural municipalities. In addition, tools were created to contact, collect, analyze, and include the opinions of rural citizens. One of main features of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) is that, for historical reasons, a very large share of the population lives in rural areas and settlements – 37% compared to 8% in other northern regions of the Russian Federation. This rural population is mostly Indigenous – Yakuts, Russian traditionalists, and other Aboriginal nations of the north. Deer-raising, hunting and fur trade, fishing, northern agriculture, and the breeding of dairy and beef cattle make up most of rural livelihoods. The agrarian sector in general makes up a major part of the Republic's gross regional product and employment. In general, by using indicators from the Russian Ministry of Economic Development, Yakutia belongs to the group of regions with higher than average economic development (22<sup>nd</sup> place in the Russian Federation), and by quality-of-life score it belongs to the group of regions with a medium level of development (31 place).

The list of rural municipalities of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) includes 374 denominations. The vast majority of rural municipalities are located in the Central and in the Arctic zones of the Republic. The industrial zone (Mirninskiy, Aldanskiy, Nyerungrinskiy, Lenskiy, Anabarskiy, Tomponskiy Oymyakonskiy, Ust-Mayskiy regions) includes only 35 rural settlements.

Practically all rural municipalities currently experience similar problems in relation to socio-economic development. The main problems for agriculture are due to the natural climatic conditions of the Republic. The cold climate largely predetermines the high financial dependency of agricultural production. As well, the traditional way of life of the rural population is also breaking down, which contributes to migration to bigger villages and cities, and to an outflow of qualified human resources and youth.



One of the main problem that holds back the socio-economic development of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), and the main threat to economic security and sustainability continues to be under-developed transportation infrastructure. The water route of the Lena River serves as the only transportation link for more than 80% of the region's territory. This route, however, functions only less than half of the year and is prone to natural disasters such as flooding. The seasonal nature of goods transportation takes away significant financial resources, which in turn significantly increases production costs.

Another important problem is a high degree of deterioration of many of the main social institutions, especially in rural areas. Thus, 60% of rural schools in the Republic, and 62% of rural social centers, require major repairs. Further, 20% of schools and 21% of rural social centers are in need of emergency repairs. The amount of funding for rural cultural entities is also not sufficient. The material and technical condition of the majority of rural cultural entities is extremely unsatisfactory. There is a lack of qualified professionals in the field of culture and art.

Housing is another area that needs investment. Only 46.4% of rural housing has access to indoor hot water. This means that only 9,473 million square meters of housing is provided with hot water. There are some regions where no part of the existing housing stock has hot water access.

There are also serious problems with staffing in the field of medicine. The unsatisfactory situation with respect to transportation links to most rural settlements dictates the necessity to provide inter-regional Emergency medical centers with specialized air transport and off-road vehicles. While remote telediagnosics and telesurgery services are developing slowly, there continues to be a lack of highly qualified specialists in the rural areas. The relatively high incidence of tuberculosis among the population, especially children, remains a very important problem.

The incidence and rate of alcoholism is higher than average compared to the Russian Federation, and even higher than averages found in other areas of the Russian North. Crimes, incidents, poisonings, and injuries related to alcoholism every year lead to premature deaths among mainly the working population of the Republic. The modern healthcare system of the



Republic, as well as the supporting social services, is not yet adequate enough in the given situation.

Against the backdrop of a breakdown of the traditional Aboriginal lifestyle, and a worsening of the socio-economic situation in some places, one can also observe a crisis of family and marriage. In some remote locations, for example, there are low indicators of family men. For example, among tribal communities up to 89% of the male population (of reproductive age) is described as 'without a family. The 'crisis of family' among northern people is also clear from the fact that the number of single-parent families – mainly single mothers and widows with kids – is growing. Finally, demographic indicators show that the urbanization process of Indigenous people is continuing.

### **Rural Ecosystem Issues**

As a whole, the ecological situation in the republic, except for the areas of intensive economic development that take a small part of its territory, can be seen as favorable. The rural communities and economies of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), are closely linked to the natural environment. There are, however, some ecological problems in the rural municipalities of the Republic. These include:

- Land disturbance and lack of re-vegetation;
- Lack of provision of quality drinking water for the local population;
- Insufficient solutions for consumer and industrial waste recycling;
- Overexploitation of fish, fur-bearing animals, and ungulates;
- Overexploitation of hayfields and pastures, leading to soil depletion, etc.;
- Increase in the number of forest fires and areas of pest distribution;
- Flooding of lands, damage to settlements and economic assets and infrastructure from rising groundwater levels, collapse of the coastline;
- Unsatisfactory condition of the liquidated industrial enterprises fund;
- Unsatisfactory ecological condition of military bases and of other equipment and objects from the armed forces that were left as a result of their cutting down, reforming, technical rearmament, and for other reasons;
- Disturbance of avifauna and fish fauna habitats;
- Unfavorable epidemic of hepatitis, as well as a number of especially dangerous infections; possibility from an increase of harmful insects in settlements;



- Negative manifestations of global warming;
- Periodic decrease in the thickness of the ozone layer above Yakutia;
- Ecological damage to the Kolym region territory of the Republic due to the construction and exploitation of hydroelectric power station on Kolyma river;

There is also a question of rehabilitating contaminated radiation territories (a consequence of underground nuclear explosions) that is related to these main ecological problems.

The fragility of the balance of northern ecosystems fully puts the question of ecology among priority ones when considering any investment projects and activities related to primary as well as continuous land development. The environment's potential to purify itself is lessened due to low yearly average temperatures and wide scale permafrost. As a result, the persistence of pollutants from mining, oil and gas, and manufacturing industries lasts in the air, water, and soil for a long time. For many rural settlements, the lack of quality drinking water also remains an acute environmental and community problem. In a lot of villages, there are no wastewater treatment facilities for sewage wastes.

### **Looking Forward – the Foundations for Socio-economic Development**

To move forward with effective socio-economic development, we must understand both constraints and opportunities. From our project, it is worth underlining two key problems that we have discovered:

- In rural municipalities, there are almost no developed innovative programs and projects;
- There is also a low level of inter-regional and international cooperation amongst these rural municipalities.

According to respondents' opinions, there are many factors that can contribute to an increase in wealth for rural inhabitants, and to building the economic potential of rural regions. Some of the main factors are:

1. Effective municipal management;
2. Work with researchers and use the contributions of science to help resolve the practical problems of local and regional development;
3. Stable funding for a logistical support, and improvement of construction designs;
4. Increase in safe and quality energy for northern villages;
5. Restoration of medical, commercial, cultural, and transport services of northern villages and place all industrial activities according to standards;



6. Self-employment in small business and services, food self-sufficiency through animal breeding produce, reindeer breeding, and other traditional activities;
7. Stimulating the development of small and medium entrepreneurship, which for many (except for traditional activities) is basically the only opportunity for social and economic development, creation of social and engineering infrastructure, employment of rural population;
8. Involvement of municipalities in regional ecological politics;
9. Development of state-private partnerships;
10. Development of ecological and scientific tourism;
11. Development of the system of specially protected environmental territories, which contribute to conservation and restoration of unique environmental complexes and landscapes (today about 28% of the territory), and which can support future ecotourism;
12. Ecological education of the population.

At the same time, we attribute a special importance to international partnerships in helping to solve the problems outlined above. Indeed, during the process of our research we found the need for an exchange of experience between the leadership of local self-governance institutions of rural settlements, administration specialists, and organizations with our international partners. This necessity led us to organize the international research conferences and workshops in 2009-2014. Also we organized annual international summer schools and business schools in Yakutsk. These were also delivered in the rural settlements of the Republic. All of these events gave a push for the development of civic activity and an increase in the number of initiatives, including the development of small businesses, coming from the local population.

### **Closing**

In both the scientific and educational processes, we attribute special attention to social projects; including support for, and development of, museums in small villages and the activities of schools and kindergartens. Thanks to international knowledge partnerships, schools and kindergartens start to win in Republican and regional contests of innovative projects.



We note that participation of international partners from Canada, Norway, and Finland in the project work directly with the local population of rural settlements across Yakutia. This has influenced the growth in activity, responsibility, innovative thinking, and unity of local population which orients towards both social and economic development. Therefore, international partnerships today are one of the conditions for sustainable development of rural populations in the Russian North.

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