

## **GLOBAL ACTION FOR WOMEN TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**E. V. Nikonorova**

*Department of Ecology and Management of Natural Resources, Russian Academy of Public Administration Under the RF President, Moscow, Russia*

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### **Summary**

An in-depth study of sustainable development concept, Russia's opportunities for choosing sustainable development as its strategic path, and sociological and socio-ecological studies resulted in the awareness of the fact that ecological relations typical of every level of culture not only include relations between society and nature, but also those within society itself, i.e. relations between sexes or socio-sex relations. The situation in Russia is coming about in such a way that working women who account for almost one half of the economically gainful population generally have a higher educational standard, but they are not fully integrated in the decision-making process on matters of environmental protection and the rational use of natural resources. As is known from world philosophy, the masculine and the feminine principles in the world, in the Universe, and in each individual are the two poles, which have to keep their opposition in order to create a fruitful dynamism, a kind of productive force and energy, which corresponds to this polarity. Mention must be made of the fact that the social sex behavior in Russia and, in particular, attitude to women rest on a specific mentality formed under the influence of various factors amongst which the cultural features enjoy major importance.

The formation of sustainable development culture implies such a transformation of patriarchal values under which the alienation of the masculine (social) and feminine (natural) principles in society is leveled out. This alienation emerged historically, in the process of civilization's development, and requires culture's democratization through its "feminization." More than that a balanced gender approach is connected not only with the changed position of women but also with the changed position of men due to the change of social roles and the formation of a new sphere of social policy—the family-gender one. Implementation of sustainable development ideas in Russia with account for its specialty and in the context of world culture's development requires the adoption of specific practical measures. As an interim step it is necessary to form a system of social and ecological protection of women and the family. The inception of such a system will be basic to an active involvement of women and men in the sustainable development process.

### **1. Sustainable Development Concept: Russian Realities**

The area of socio-ecological research aimed to study the role and place of the main social strata and groups of population in implementing the sustainable development strategy has widened in the recent years in many respects due to the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio and, more specifically, its main document "Agenda for the Twenty-first Century."

An inspiring impetus came from Paragraphs 24 and 25 of the Agenda devoted to the role of women (Par. 24) and the role of children and youths (Par. 25) in safeguarding sustainable development.

After the Rio conference measures were taken by the international organizations in order to implement the planned strategy. Russia is part of this process: on April 1, 1997 the Decree of the Russian Federation President "On the Concept of the Russian Federation's Transition to Sustainable Development" was enacted, and these problems were also discussed at the All-Russia Environmental Protection Congress (1995, Moscow).

On the one hand, this impetus encouraged the women's environmental movement and brought about a lot of new environmental organizations in different legal statuses in which the "women's topics" are present one way or another.

At the same time one has to underscore that all these concepts as well as the "National Actions Plan to Implement the Resolutions of the UN Conference of Environment and Development" are falling short of the Conference's recommendations regarding women in spite of the evident fact that the humanist orientation of development in any community and in society as a whole has to be made more concrete, also in terms of the gender approach.

This approach is an integral part of the socio-ecological analysis, because mankind's division into two largest groups by sex is a purely natural factor. The process of nature's socialization in the process of culture's development includes, as a specific form of its expression, the process of sex socialization. Environmental relations, therefore, typical

of each level of culture include not only relations between society and nature but also those within society itself, i.e. relations between the sexes—the gender relations.

An in-depth study of sustained development concept, Russia's opportunities for choosing sustainable development as its strategic path, and sociological and socio-ecological studies resulted in a different understanding of women's place and role in Russia in the sustainable development process.

It is primarily due to the fact that the Agenda for the Twenty-first Century (Par. 24) makes a major emphasis on the need for women's education with a view to invigorate their role in the decision-making process, family planning, i.e. the solution of the demographic problem.

The situation in Russia has been developing in such a way that working women who account for 47% of the economically gainful population has a higher educational level. Amongst those gainfully employed and having a higher education women constitute 50.5% and account for 56.2% of those with a specialized secondary education.

### **1.1 Specific Features of Women's Position**

At the same time, the analysis of the current situation in Russia illustrates that women are not sufficiently integrated in the decision-making process on issues of environmental protection and the rational use of natural resources, i.e. they cannot disclose potentialities and makings inherent in them and use those in the interests of sustainable development of society as a whole which needs exactly these makings at the current stage of its development.

This state of affairs is due to a low social status of women in Russia. In particular, women's political status is extremely low, the degree of their involvement in the management system and in the decision-making process on socio-ecological, economic, and political matters. They are poorly represented at all levels of legislative and executive power and management: women account only for 7.2% in the Federal Assembly, there are no women at all among the heads of local administrations, and female assistant heads of local administrations are few and far between.

There are practically no women at the top level of executive power connected with the solution of ecological problems, in particular among the Collegiums members of the Ministry of Nature and the Ministry for Emergencies. There are no women at all in the leading bodies of the Federal Environmental Fund, the Supreme Environmental Council and the like.

The analysis of programs of the majority of political parties registered in Russia reveals that they do not reflect the specific interests of women, especially in connection with the solution of environmental problems.

The adoption of the path of sustainable and ecologically safe development by Russia has been also determined by women's economic position. Deformities in the privatization policy, the mafia structures, the anti-democratic and aggressively

patriarchal character of property distribution have resulted in that a greater share of natural, economic, and financial resources is in the hands of men while women are not really taking part in their management, distribution, and utilization. According to the data supplied by international organizations, men account for 40% of the world's poor and women—for 60%, and the tendency toward an increasing share of the poor amongst the female population seems to be on the upgrade. In Russia poverty has always been threatening women more than anyone else, and, according to the World Bank research data, the number of women among the Russian poor will grow, because they are in a majority in the four least socially protected population groups: pensioners, single-parent families, families with many children, and students' families.

The relationship between the problems of poverty and the solution of ecological problems has been evident and proven to the world community since way back. Therefore, an indispensable condition of Russia's transition to the path of sustainable development must be a genuine democratization of natural, production, and financial resources on the basis of principles of equality and equitability in order to exercise control over the utilization of these resources not only by men but also by women, and to create an autonomous financial and credit facility to handle ecological expertise, ecological auditing and investments in projects of ecological priority.

Especially alarming in the context of deteriorated environmental situation in Russia is the disastrous decline of Russian people's health, including problems connected with the changes in the gene stock, dropping birth rates, and the growth of mortality rates among mothers and infants as well as children's morbidity. All this is directly related to women's health because 90% of working women in Russia are in the reproductive age group, and environmental pollution communicates to children through mother's organism.

Besides, life has shown that as a result of disasters and emergencies caused by natural and technogenic factors all the malfunctioning in kids, health is borne by women, because it is them who sacrifice their work and position in society and look after the children's medical treatment and their adaptation to social conditions in case of grave physical and mental traumas.

Finally, women bear the brunt of the aftermath of ethnic, political and military conflicts which not only ruin the family homes and kill the relatives, especially the males, but also destroy the ecological and cultural environment needed by women to carry out their traditional duties, including the traditional skills of handling the natural environment in places historically connected with the development of agriculture or traditional economic forms typical of smaller peoples and ethnic groups.

The ruination of the ecological and cultural environment makes any nation or national community loose its spiritual roots and, likewise, the moral norms of great importance and value to humanity and lead to the estrangement of the people from the natural and cultural environment, from society and from other people and to self-estrangement which creates a climate of socio-psychological discomfort in society.

Thus, a higher status of women in contemporary Russia determines the prospects of the

nation's development as a whole and is an indispensable prerequisite for the stabilization of the socio-ecological situation. It should not be something that only women and women's organizations care about, but it is the duty of the bodies of state.

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### Biographical Sketch

**Ekaterina V. Nikonorova**, Professor

WORK

Russian Academy of Public Administration Under the President  
of the Russian Federation Moscow, Russia

Department of Ecology and Management of Natural Resources

Doctor of Science (Philosophy)

Since November 1999 – current

Russian State Library, Moscow, Russia

Deputy General Director of the

Director on Science and Publishing

Education:

July,1973 Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia

Department of Biology,Anthropology Division –

Master of Science Degree(Biology)

June,1994 Russian Academy of Administration Moscow, Russia

Dissertation topic: Philosophical and Sociological

Aspects of Ecological Culture Formation

Doctor of Science Degree (Philosophy, Social Ecology):

Fields of scientific work:

Social Ecology

other fields: Sociology,Women and Gender Studies

current research interests: Social and Humanitarian Aspects of Sustainable and Environmentally Safe Development

Publications: more than 40 scientific and popular articles.

2000 Sustainable Development: Prospects of Research. Collection of articles. Scientific editor. Moscow, “Economy and Informatics” publishing. 300 pp.