

## **RECOGNIZING AND STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THEIR COMMUNITIES**

**Vladimir Pavlenko**

*Moscow 117036, Russia*

**Keywords:** indigenous (native) people, native self-government, aboriginal claim, federal trust (trust responsibilities), native land claims, revival of the tribal councils, subsistence, sustainable development, reindeer herding, fishing, hunting, marine mammals hunting

### **Contents**

1. Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North on the Brink of the Third Millennium

1.1. Population

1.2. Economy

1.3. State Policy

2. Perspectives of Indigenous People Development

Acknowledgements

Glossary

Bibliography

Biographical Sketch

### **Summary**

Mankind enters the twenty-first century with an enormous load of unsettled ecological, economic and social problems. Despite the tremendous investment of material and intellectual resources into the just ended Decade of Indigenous People, the problems of improving the living standards of aborigines, and their adaptation to present-day conditions in Russia, became even more acute.

Thirty nations inhabiting the territories of 27 subjects of the Russian Federation belong to indigenous minorities of the North of Russia. These are Aleutians, Dolgians, Itelmenians, Ketians, Koryaks, Kumandlans, Mansis, Nanaians, Negidaliens, Nenets, Nganasans, Nivkhs, Oroks, Oroches, Lapps, Selkups, Teleuts, Tophalars, Tuvinians-Todginians, Udeges, Ulches, Khanty, Chavants, Chukchi, Shorts, Evenks, Evens, Ents, Eskimos and Yukahirs. Having, over thousands of years, accommodated themselves to extreme natural and climatic conditions, indigenous peoples have created a specific way of life and culture that are in fundamental association with the environment, and enable them to get everything needed for life support without disturbance of the fragile balance in the Northern ecology. Traditional life support is of critical importance for the existence of these small groups of peoples in the North.

Contacts with developed industrial society disturbed that balance and caused in many respects irremediable damage to traditional habitat as well as to traditional methods of management. Paternalistic policy in the Soviet period, industrial expansion in the 1970s-1980s and insufficiently considered diffusion of economic innovations of the

1990s to the Northern territories put Northern peoples on the verge of extinction. It is to be expected that the degree of industrialization in the Northern territories will grow; the mainly raw-oriented economic development of the Northern territories will continue for many years. Inevitably, more and more new territories, with the traditional displacement of indigenous peoples, will be involved in industrial development, enhancing thereby a number of ethnic contact zones and, accordingly, encouraging assimilation processes. Improvement of communication systems still more intensifies these processes; moreover, bearers of traditional culture are small in number and do not have much power. This predetermines an important role of the State in ensuring conditions for indigenous people's development. The shaping of specific legal grounds and an adequate economic mechanism comes to the forefront.

The preservation of ancient ethnic groups and their cultures may be ensured only with a high degree of social activity on the part of the people smallest in number as well as through the formation of a national intelligentsia (intellectuals) capable of entering professionally into equal partnership to deal with problems and to ensure effectively the economic security of their people, taking into account the interests of other peoples and of the country at large.

## **1. Indigenous Peoples of the Russian North on the Brink of the Third Millennium**

The indigenous minorities of the North (natives) present unique communities of people whose phenogentype was formed under the influence of severe natural and climatic conditions. The knowledge and experience in the use and preservation of the environment, that have been acquired in the struggle for existence, are of unquestionable value and represent the property of humanity. The importance of this experience can scarcely be exaggerated in conditions of industrial extension further and further to the north and the Arctic regions. According to forecasts, it is just there that the largest oil and gas, valuable fossil fuels and mineral reserves are concentrated. That's why the question of these nations' fortunes, and the application of their knowledge by humanity, acquire especial significance on the threshold of the twenty-first century. What are the starting conditions for the transition of Russian natives to the new millennium? How have the historical fortunes of 30 small nations been formed in this enormous country going through a complicated period in its development?

### **1.1. Population**

Nenets represent the largest group of natives (33 000). There are 25 500 Evenks, 17 300 Khanty, 13000 Chukchi, and 12 000 Evens. A number of other nations are made up of considerably less than 10 000. Seven nations have less than 1000. Oroks (5 persons), Ents (116 persons), Aleuts (278 persons) and Negidalts (384) represent the smallest groups. Aboriginal nations of the North are settled in a dispersed manner in Russia throughout a vast territory about 12 000 km long from east to west and 5000 km from north to south, covering diverse natural and climatic zones, specifically tundra, forest-tundra, taiga and mountain areas.

Natural conditions have exerted decisive influences upon each of these nations' tenor of life, their ability to adapt and, in the end, survive.

Considering features of the demographic situation among indigenous nations, it should be observed that 11 nations (Nenets, Mansi, Khekchi, Kets, Nganasans, Orochi, Ulchi, Eskimos, Yukagirs, Orts, Koumandints) are still increasing in population on an average of 8 percent. The highest rate was registered with the Shorts (13.4 percent), and the lowest with the Ulchi (0.1 percent). The rate of population growth has slowed down with the Nenets, Ulchi and, in particular, with Eskimos. Thus, if in 1996 the growth made up 11.6 percent compared with 1995, then in 1997 it accounted for only 2.8 percent compared with 1996. The overall death-rate for 13 of the 30 indigenous nations of the North (16.2 percent) exceeds the average for Russia: for the Ents and Orochi it is more than twice as high.

The death-rate is influenced to a great extent by deterioration in social and living conditions, the unfavorable sanitarian and epidemiological situation resulting from intensive industrial pollution of the territories, and low standards of public health, especially in remote national settlements. The switch-over from traditional nutrition to a so-called European type of diet encourages the spread of diseases of the digestive organs, of hypovitaminosis and caries: the microelement composition of the diet is inadequate for the metabolism of indigenous northern people, with its scanty level of calories and unbalanced vitamin content.

The spread of a settled way of life, the expeditious integration into industrial society in its present socio-economic condition, and the loss of traditional kinds of labor and lifestyle have led to the rise of lumpenized groups among aboriginal inhabitants, in significant excess of all-Russian indices of the following so-called "social" diseases:

- **active tuberculosis:** The morbidity rate in the Russian Federation comes to 0.68 (per 1000 population); in the areas of indigenous people residence it amounts to 0.78 (per 1000 population);
- **alcoholism and alcoholic psychosis:** A minor decline in the morbidity rate is observed in the Russian Federation on the whole and in the areas of native residence in 1997 compared with 1990; morbidity rates are 1.4 and 2 (per 1000 population) respectively;
- **lues:** An enormous growth in morbidity has been observed from 1990, 50 fold in the Russian Federation, and 100 fold in the areas where the indigenous minorities of the northern nations live; morbidity rates are 2.6 and 2.8 (per 1000 population) respectively.

The poor state of health of the northern inhabitants is the chief cause of the elevated death rate and, as a result, the life expectancy of the northern nations is 10-15 years below the average in Russia. Even if negative demographic tendencies have not so far proved dangerous for large ethnic communities, the natives are threatened with total disappearance.

The figures for population employment don't look optimistic either. Because of the weakening of State centralized policy with respect to regions and the development of crisis phenomena in the economy, the problem of population employment in the northern territories has become sharply aggravated.

From the very first days of transition to market economy, the number of people employed in the public production sector from the aboriginal population declined. From 1995 to 1997 only it fell by 8 percent, from 42 900 to 39 300, a figure which represents 25 percent only of the total number of natives. As a comparison, the ratio of the Russian Federation’s population involved in public production to the total number of the Russian Federation’s inhabitants is 45 percent. In the largest ethnic groups like Khanty, Evenks, Chukchi, Evens, Dolgans and Mansi the ratio of employees to the total number of the nationality is about 30 percent. Only Nenets have their ratio below the average, at 23 percent. In the Aleutians and Chuvants groups the ratio exceeds even the all-Russian level, at 48 and 46 percent respectively. In Kets, Nganasans, Orochi, Selkups, Udege and Ents it does not exceed 20 percent. These findings are indicative of the large social burden on the economically active population resulting in the deterioration of the socio-economic status of ethnic groups on the whole and of the material well-being in the families of the natives.

In 1997, 23 out of 26 indigenous nations faced a decline in the number of people in employment, as compared with 1995, by (in percent):

- Orochi 46
- Ents 44
- Chuvants 36
- Yukagirs over 20
- Nganasans over 20
- Kets over 20
- Itelmens over 20
- Udege over 20
- Ents over 20
- Koryaks 14-19
- Nanaians 14-19
- Evens 14-19
- Evenks 14-19

Only Eskimos, Mansi and Lapps managed to increase their numbers of employees by 24, 13.5 and 5 percent respectively.

Women make up over 50 percent of the working population in practically all nations. Only in Khanty, Uregeyts, Yukagirs, Chuvants and Eskimos groups is the number of working women slightly less than 50 percent of the total numbers of workers.

Branch of Economy	Total number of workers	Including women	As compared to Russian Federation
Total	100	55	100
including:			
Agriculture	37	36	14
Education	22	85	11
Public Health, Physical Training, Social Security,	8	90	7

Communal Services			
Non-Industrial Consumer Services Administrative Bodies	6	70	3
Industry	6	29	25
Trade Industry, Supply	4	56	10
Others	6	-	25

\* Author`s calculations

Table 1: Distribution of native workers by economy branches.

Table 1: “Distribution of native workers by economy branches” shows that most aboriginal workers are employed in agriculture (37 percent) and education (22 percent) unlike the Russian Federation where the biggest category of employed people is in industry (25 percent) and agriculture (14 percent). It should also be observed that the number of natives employed in agriculture has declined by 15 percent since 1996. This was a result of the disintegration of the previous state system of agricultural organization. Farms and communal patrimonies that were set up in their place did not compensate for the loss of jobs after liquidation of the state and collective farms. The situation was aggravated by a sharp decline in fishing and reindeer herding, primitive produce processing technologies, unadjusted product sales patterns, and low competitiveness due to enormous transportation costs.

For the indigenous population, employment in industry only reaches 6%. In 1997 only 6 percent of the aboriginal population were employed in industry; i.e. by 32 percent less than in 1995. The number of industrial facilities in native residence areas was curtailed by 2.5 times compared with 1996. Only in the Tomsk and Sakhalin regions was their number slightly on the rise during that period. It did not have much impact on the labor market even within these territories since employees from indigenous peoples are mainly used for accessory work due to poor skill and these jobs are the first to be axed in crisis situations. In industries connected with trade, public catering, and the supply of materials and machinery the number of employed people from the aboriginal population declined in 1997 by 21 percent compared with 1996; in the sector of culture and arts it was reduced by 5 percent.

The number of people employed in the education sector increased by 5 percent; in public health, by 6 percent; in administrative bodies, by 3 percent; and in communal and housing services, by 18 percent. The quoted figures reveal that an intensive process of reduction in the number of employed in traditional sectors of the economy is under way (53 percent of employed in 1993; 37 percent in 1997). Meanwhile, in employment structure the ratio of the so-called “social” sector is on the rise. Thus, occupation in traditional kinds of labor stops serving as a basic criterion for the identification of a nation`s specific features, and this may complicate the process of revival and sustainable development in northern ethnic groups. At present up to 25-30 percent, and in some remote national settlements up to 100 percent, of able-bodied people from the minority nations of the North are unemployed. The number of hard-core unemployed is

on the rise, and local migration-flows to bigger communities build up, enhancing therein the ranks of lumpenized elements.

-  
-  
-

TO ACCESS ALL THE 13 PAGES OF THIS CHAPTER,  
Visit: <http://www.eolss.net/Eolss-sampleAllChapter.aspx>

### **Bibliography**

- Kriykov V.A (1996) *Indigenous people and land law*. Gosudarstvo i pravo. № 1. Russia.
- Klovov K.B. (1997) *Traditional resource management of the northern people: concept of the development*. Institute of Geography. St.-Peterburg, Russia.
- Pika A.I., Prohorov B.B. (1995) *Nontraditionalism of the Russian North*. Moscow, Russia.
- Pavlenko V.I. (1995) *Problems of the social and economic development of the Arctic*. Moscow. Russia
- Serkin V.P. (1997). *Northern people*. Kolyma. Russia.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Vladimir Pavlenko is a General Director of the Arctic Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Science, and Professor of Economics. Professor Pavlenko's research interests are focused in a number of scientific areas. One is social science and the industrial development of the Arctic and Northern regions of Russia. A second area is the sustainable development of Russia and, particularly, circumpolar territories, and international cooperation and security in the Arctic. Of special scientific interest are the ecological problems in the North, and protection of the arctic marine environment. Professor Pavlenko was a participant of a number of expeditions in the Arctic. He is also expert in State Duma of the Russian Federation.