

CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RUSSIA

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Summary

Sustainable development of children depends much on the population's ability to bring up children and youth. And this issue is extremely urgent in present day Russia. In childhood the foundation of personality is laid, the main qualities are formed: physical and mental health, cultural, moral, and intellectual potential. At the same time, it is worth noting, that the problems of children and youth in Russia, like all over the world, are studied and solved by representatives of separate spheres: teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc. Each of them performs concrete functions, but their activities are not coordinated and sometimes are harmful to a child or a young person. As a result, their efforts are directed not at helping or supporting a child, but at solving the tasks set by the society. For example, teachers are concerned with teaching children and youth. But sometimes they do it with no account of the specific of children's health or mentality. Sustainable development of children and youth is determined by the attitude society holds towards them. Presently, adult people are the center of attention; children and young people are in an outlying area. They are usually seen as objects of action rather than thought. This attitude towards children results in an unintentional and un-comprehended understating of their real abilities and rights. Children are not only engaged in playing, but produce valuable mental "products" and act as producers of material goods. They have an influence on economics and society. Their work has a certain value, since studying is a

part of the social division of labor, which enables accumulation of human potential. Sustainable development of children and youth is determined by many factors. This article addresses the most significant of them: health, education, treatment of children and youth in family, economic welfare, morality, environment, drug addiction, alcoholism, and crime. Formation of market relations, the economic crisis, growing income differentiation and all changes in the real life of people have brought about a significant change in the position of children and youth. Under these conditions the perspectives for sustainable development of children and youth will depend on the success of the measures aimed at their protection and support. This work can be carried on in three directions:

- Children as an object of social support: measures for combining children's studies with work; protection of children in disadvantaged families, including one-parent families and families with many children, and organization of shelters for homeless children.
- Rendering help to the agents of upbringing (parents and teachers): lectures on the problems of upbringing children; informing parents about social benefits for children; raising the professional skills of teachers; creation of appropriate conditions for their work and life.
- Creation of modern surroundings for children. Children's development is closely related to their place of residence and housing conditions. For example, architecture of the newly built blocks of flats has an adverse effect on children's state of mind. Children living in new residential districts with rectangular buildings and unknown people are more aggressive than children living in old districts. They more often get together in various groups, including criminal.

Under the present conditions, the sustainability of social development acquires a special significance. It is a complicated socioeconomic phenomenon depending on many circumstances. When classifying them, it is necessary to single out first of all population, which serves as both the object and the subject of the process under investigation. Children and youth take an important place within the population

1. Historic Analysis of the Problem

The share of children and youth in the Russian population is 42.4%, of which 24.9% are children and 17.5% youth. But the significance of this group is determined not so much by its scale, as by its role in the life of society. It is the state of children and youth that predetermines the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of both present and future populations, its socio-demographic structure and socio-psychological features. In childhood the foundation of personality is laid, the main qualities are formed: physical and mental health, cultural, moral and intellectual potential. The qualities, with which a child is endowed, particularly in the initial period of life, are the most important and stable; to change them in subsequent years is rather difficult, and in some cases actually impossible. Successful formation of a child, and subsequently of a young man as a personality, will determine not only his integration into social life, finding his niche, but after all—the progress of society, its sustainable development. But the role of children is not confined to this. Their value for humanity, society, and family is first of all in their existence. Awareness and comprehension of this role of children implies an immense responsibility of the state, society, family, and the entire population by the solution of

the socioeconomic problems, requiring maximum consideration of their interests. This is why it is so important to create favorable surroundings, normal living conditions for future citizens, for socialization of each person.

At the same time, it is worth noting, that the problems of children and youth in Russia, like all over the world, are studied and solved by representatives of separate spheres: teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc. Each of them performs concrete functions, but their activities are not coordinated and sometimes are harmful to a child, or a young person. As a result, their efforts are directed not at helping or supporting a child, but at solving the tasks set by the society. For example, teachers are concerned with teaching children and youth. But sometimes they do it with no account of the specific of children's health or mentality. This results in a higher degree of tiredness in children, their overburdening, nervous breakdown, and deterioration of health. This directly affects the sustainable development of children and youth, and subsequently the whole society.

Sustainable development of children and youth is determined by the attitude of the society towards them. Presently, adult people are the center of attention, children and young people are in an outlying area. They are usually seen as objects of action rather than thought. Such attitudes result in unintentional and un-comprehended understating of their real abilities and rights. Society has not yet addressed the idea of how a child will live tomorrow, if today he/she is not allowed to live a conscious, responsible life. As a result, children are "excluded" from the adult life. They are in a position of "minority". This concerns youth to a lesser extent, of course. On the one hand, this position gives them certain advantages: they are protected and safeguarded, and they have concrete privileges in this life. On the other hand, their protection from the society is at the same time a protection of society from them. So, this part of the population, particularly children, is in a sense marginalized. The only possible way to change the situation is to acknowledge that children and youth are not only an object of protection, upbringing, socialization and other external actions, but also an active, conscious subject of vital activity. This opinion is shared by A. F. Losev, J. Quortrup, A. M. Ambert, Ch. Wentersberger, J. Korshak, and F. M. Dostoyevsky, etc. Children are actual personalities. Children are not only engaged in playing, but produce valuable mental "products" and act as producers of material goods. They have an influence on economics and society; their work has a certain value, since studying is a part of the social division of labor that enables accumulation of human potential.

2. The Present State of the Problem of Sustainable Development of Children and Youth

Sustainable development of children and youth is determined by many factors. The most significant among them are health, education, treatment of children and youth in family, economic welfare, morality, and the environment.

2.1. Health of Children and Youth

Health status of children and youth can be assessed by various factors: mortality (including infant mortality), morbidity, and physical development levels, etc. The most comprehensive characteristic of children's health status in Russia comes from results of

medical examination of young men called up for military service. They show that only 20% of draftees have the required health status.

Monitoring of the development of a healthy generation, conducted by the Institute for Socio-Economic Studies of Population, RAS, with participation of the author in Vologda oblast, showed that healthy children comprised 71.1% of the new-born infants covered by the survey, but by the age of 3 years their share reduced to 7.5%, i.e. decreased by a factor of more than 9.5.

Among the significant characteristics of health is mortality rate. In recent years this indicator for children has actually become stable. Analysis of statistical data shows a certain decline in the infant mortality rate: in 1990 it was 17.4%; in 1993, 19.9%, and in 1997, 17.2%. (At the same time, this rate is 2–3 higher than in developed industrial countries). But the mortality among teenagers over 15 years of age is constantly rising.

Health status of children and youth, and accordingly their sustainable development, is determined by many circumstances. First of all, by the economic crisis experienced by Russia. It actually predetermined all negative factors of children's health. The most striking characteristic of the situation is that the share of state expenditure on health care is less than 3% of the GDP.

Poor working conditions of parents, especially mothers, also affect children's health. In early 1994, 14.9% of the women employed in industry worked in conditions that did not meet the sanitary standards, and 6.9% were exposed to high levels of noise and gas pollution.

The present system of health care also has a negative impact on children's health. The major part of the available resources and effort is focused on treating those children who are already ill. Medical care is fighting the consequences of this. The most effective means of reducing children's morbidity would be introduction of a system of preventive measures. But there is no such system in the country. Only separate measures are taken, but under the present conditions their number is constantly declining. Thus in 1990, 88.1% of children aged 0–12 years underwent preventive examinations and in 1996, 83.2%, i.e. 4.9% less. There is, however, a positive tendency: since 1995 the share of those who undergo preventive examinations in the age group 13–14 has increased. Preventive examinations in other age groups of youth are actually not conducted.

Another significant cause of the deterioration in health status of the population, including children, lies in environment. According to Rosgidromet (Russian Metrological Agency), average annual concentrations of injurious substances surpassed the permissible levels in 187 cities, and in 66 cities they were 10 times higher than the permissible levels.

Children's health is negatively affected by abortions, which are still the main means of family planning. In 1997, 203 abortions were registered per 100 births.

So, we must recognize that the state of health of children and youth in present-day Russia is not contributory to the sustainability of population development.

2.2. Education of Children and Youth

2.2.1. Child Pre-school Establishments

In recent years the number of pre-school establishments has been constantly declining. Regrettably, in the distribution of resources allocated for education, the interests of children in pre-school age are, as a rule, the last to be taken into account.

As a result, from 1990 to 1996 the number of pre-school establishments reduced by 21.9% and the number of children in them, by 37.8%. This was primarily due to the high cost of these services. This situation, despite the opinion of the family upbringing advisers, is dangerous for children in disadvantaged families living below the poverty line. Educational establishments serve for such children as means of social protection; they make up for the deficiencies of family upbringing and family budget.

It should be noted that, for all the advantages of family upbringing of children in pre-school age over that in special establishments, parents are poorly prepared for bringing up their children. Kindergartens do more than just take care of them. Kindergarten teachers have special pedagogical education; they give them lessons in music, singing, physical culture, prepare them for school, teach them to deal with others. Even in well-to-do families children staying at home are to a considerable extent left on their own. Parents often offer them little more than the opportunity to paint pictures or watch TV programs. Sometimes, provided parents have free time, they read books. But this kind of recreation is declining. Parents do not even realize how low their pedagogical potential is, and how harmful this may be for children. And no progress is expected here.

Recent years have seen a certain improvement in the quality of staff at pre-school establishments. Thus, from 1990 to 1996 the number of teachers with higher and secondary special education grew by 14.6%. Of those, teachers with higher pedagogical education increased by 37.9%, and with secondary, by 7.8%. The number of speech therapists increased by 75.7%, and defectologists by almost 2 times. Specialists with better training now visit pre-school establishments. This must have a positive effect on the upbringing of children, and their preparation for studies at school.

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Biographical Sketch

Yelena Breeva was born in 1955. She graduated from the Moscow Economic-Statistical Institute, Department of Statistics, with a specialty in demography (1978), with a Doctor of Economic Sciences. Since 1990 she has worked at the Institute for Socio-Economic Studies of Population, Russian Academy of Sciences, as leading researcher. Her research interests are focused on children and youth issues: their health, education, work, relationships with parents and children of their age, problems of homeless and abandoned children. Her main publications are: *Children in Russia: Socio-Economic Problems*. Moscow: ISESP RAS, 1994; *Children in the Current Society*. Moscow: Editorial URSS, 1990; *Politics, Children and Market. Sociological Studies*, 7, 1995 (in Russian); and *Current Problems of the Social Support of Children. Demographic Journal*, 2, 1996 (in Russian).