

LOCAL AUTHORITIES' INITIATIVES IN SUPPORT OF AGENDA 21 -RUSSIA

N.Glazovsky

Institute of Geography, Russian Academy of Sciences

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Summary

This article considers the activity of local authorities in support of Agenda 21. The main UN documents defining activity in this sphere are given. The main international organizations assisting the activity of local authorities on sustainable development are reviewed, and the main directions and programs of sustainable development at the local level are considered. The results of this activity after the Rio conference are described and the most important directions for future activity are described. Difficulties and perspectives of development of these initiatives in Russia are shown. Concrete examples are given of progress in reinforcement of local authorities' role in ensuring sustainable development in Russia, at federal and local levels.

1. Objectives, Possibilities and Mechanisms of Sustainable Development at Different Levels of Natural-Social Systems

The Agenda 21 adopted in Rio de Janeiro envisages very different levels of activity to ensure sustainable development. It is reasonable to dwell on consideration of at least three main levels: global, national (regional) and local. We may distinguish the most important tasks for each of the levels.

Global Level

Main goals: the following main goals for the activity at this level are:

- conservation of biosphere sustainability as the basis for human and social vital activity,
- reduction of global socio-economic imbalance which may lead to social disruption and in turn exacerbate regional imbalance.

It is quite evident that human life on Earth depends directly on preservation of the main biosphere functions and the availability of resources.

To achieve these important goals of sustainable development at the global level, very different mechanisms must be used. In our view, their importance and significance may be enumerated in the following order:

- Political: choice of new priorities at the inter-state level, and inter-state regulation and governance.
- Juridical: international agreements and conventions in the field of the environment.
- Economic: common policies of groups of countries to defend their ecological and economic interests. Common policy on price formation. Common policy on increase of the value of natural resources. Uniting the potential for solution of general tasks (OPEC countries). Creation of the new world economic order.
- Financial: for example, reduction of military expenditures.

National / Regional Level

Main goals:

- safety of citizens and state
- economic development
- solution of economic problems
- maintenance of social justice

We believe, in particular, that the main goal of the Russian state is to ensure the welfare of Russian citizens on the basis of economic development, ecological stability and social stability of society.

It is at this level that all the mechanisms may work most efficiently. They may be classified in the following way:

- Political
- Legal mechanisms
 - Development of the national legal basis
 - Improvement of legislation
 - Improvement of activity of juridical organs
 - Development of international agreements
- Normative base
- Administrative mechanisms
 - Improvement of the governing structure
 - Control and audit
 - Development of expertise
- Economic mechanisms
 - Branch structure of economics
 - Regional structure of economics
 - Customs regulation

- Financial mechanisms
 - Correction of the budget structure
 - Investment policy
 - Tax policy
 - Insurance, including ecological insurance
- Monitoring and informational provision
- Scientific provision and introduction of innovations
- Culture, education and up-bringing

It is at the national level that different directions of activity in ensuring sustainable development may be formulated as economic, social and ecological policy.

Local Levels

At this level the main goals may be as follows:

- provision for prosperity
- creation of favorable life conditions for concrete local communities of people

It is evident that a number of mechanisms that are very important for ensuring sustainable development at higher levels of organization of natural-social systems will have lower or only indirect significance at local level (at least for solution of specific problems). Thus, for instance, in general, political or legal mechanisms must play a lesser part (not so much the use of laws but rather their creation). On the other hand, at the local level the importance of other mechanisms is enhanced, including:

- strengthening of the administrative mechanism,
- increase of the self-governance significance.

Different spatial scopes, doubtless specific features of natural and social processes, a set and correlation of the main operating forces allow to assume that objectives, tasks and mechanisms of sustainable development must somewhat differ at each of these levels.

2. The main UN documents defining the activity of local authorities

Local authorities have played an important part in the life of human society from the very beginning of their formation. For generations they have resolved all debates and allocated land for uses such as housing, hunting, and water supply, organized feasts, and supervised observance of local rules and customs. The range of issues in the competence of local authorities has naturally changed through the history of humankind but their activity was always extremely important.

Differences in history, culture and traditions of various peoples, as well as in the duties and responsibilities of different levels and branches of power in different regions, produce a certain individuality in the activity of local authorities. At the same time there is much in common in their activity in all regions of the world. It is the local authorities that citizens come across in their everyday life. It is local authorities that have to

reconcile important communication and managerial problems (and adapting the needs of higher levels of government) with protection of the interests of local communities.

Chapter 23 of Agenda 21 “STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF MAJOR GROUPS” says that involvement of all social groups in this activity is critical in realization of all program directions of Agenda 21. It is owing to this specifically important role of local authorities that Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 “LOCAL AUTHORITIES' INITIATIVES IN SUPPORT OF AGENDA 21” is devoted to the objectives of their activity. The first paragraph of this Chapter defines clearly the role and sphere of activity for local authorities:

“Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives. Local authorities construct, operate and maintain economic, social and environmental infrastructure, oversee planning processes, establish local environmental policies and regulations, and assist in implementing national and sub-national environmental policies. As the level of governance closest to the people, they play a vital role in educating, mobilizing and responding to the public to promote sustainable development.”

Preparation and realization of a Local Agenda 21 was recognized as the most important task for the community:

“Each local authority should enter into a dialogue with its citizens, local organizations and private enterprises and adopt "a local Agenda 21". Through consultation and consensus-building, local authorities would learn from citizens and from local, civic community, business and industrial organizations and acquire the information needed for formulating the best strategies.

The process of consultation would increase household awareness of sustainable development issues. Local authority programs, policies, laws and regulations to achieve Agenda 21 objectives would be assessed and modified, based on local programs adopted. Strategies could also be used in supporting proposals for local, national, regional and international funding.”

Development and adoption of Agenda 21 formed a basis for many local authorities having recognized their very important role in ensuring sustainable development and having created a generally recognized international legal field for their activity.

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Biographical Sketch

Nikita Fedorovich Glazovsky was born in August 1946 in Alma-Ata (Kazakhstan). A citizen of Russia, He is a corresponding-member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) and Deputy Director of the Institute of RAS.

Professor Glazovsky is one of the leading Russian geographers, a world famous scientist, a specialist on environment protection, sustainable development, use of natural resources and geochemistry of landscapes. He is the author of over 200 published works, including monographs.

He has been Deputy Minister of Ecology, Russian Federation, Chairman of Council of Ecological Foundation of Russian Federation, a member of the Higher Ecological Council, and a member of the Advisory Committee, Institute of World Resources (Washington). He is also a Regional Director of the International Program “Leadership for Environment and Development”.

In 2000 he was elected Vice-President of the International Geographical Union World.