The Impacts of, Vulnerabilities from, and Adaptation Strategies to Climate Change of Two Siberian Native Communities

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An ongoing study focuses on the impacts of, vulnerabilities from, and adaptation strategies to climate change of two Siberian native communities: the Sakha and the Evens that live in the same area (Oymyakon, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Russian Federation). Evens are semi-nomadic reindeer herders and the Sakha are horse and cattle breeders. They both practice hunting, fishing, and harvesting natural resources as necessary additions to their food supply. Evens and Sakha are well adapted to the extreme conditions of the north; however, they currently face formidable challenges due to the processes of climate change that interact synergistically with other stressing factors rooted in their recent history. To date, all studies on the local impacts of climate change in Oymyakon are confined only to physical-technical measurements of the changes in temperature, permafrost, level of precipitation, etc; however, to solve climate complex challenges, we need to consider an ecosystem-based approach and include the human dimension as well. Efficient policy actions aimed at effective adaptation to changing conditions require equal participation of local people in governance at all levels, from bottom to top. Unfortunately, they are often excluded from governance, as in Russia, where the decision-making process is highly centralized. Complexity is added by the fact that not all, but only some groups of northern peoples are recognized as a “small numbered indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East” by the Russian government with some specific protections under the law, which are often declared, but not upheld though. In Oymyakon, the Even people are legally recognized as “small numbered”, but the Sakha people are not.

This research is aimed at finding what aspects of their knowledge, culture and other factors the Evens and Sakha perceive as key to their adaptation to climate change and sustainable life, and at exploring the ways their local knowledge can benefit policy and the decision-making processes.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHY

Vera Solovyeva, native Siberian (Sakha) was born and raised in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), located in the northeastern part of the Russian Federation. She has a biology background and training at the Indigenous Studies Summer Program at Columbia University, and is now a PhD student at George Mason University, Department of Environmental Science and Public Policy. The area of her professional interest is traditional knowledge of indigenous people and climate change - how indigenous northern peoples preserve and develop their cultures and traditions in a contemporary world that is rapidly changing under the pressure of factors such as globalization and climate change. In September 2015, her research was supported by the NSF Doctoral Dissertation completion grant: http://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1439468