

SMALL PROJECTS – BIG CHANGES

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Starting from the end of 2006, a number of community development projects are being successfully carried out in several regions of Russia under the Model Communities Initiatives Program. These projects are of a distinct social and environmental orientation. The Program is supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) that has granted \$5.65 million for a period from 2006 through 2009 and is managed by the Fund for Sustainable Development (FSD).

This community development program is targeted toward integrated regional and community development through addressing environmental, economic and social concerns and includes the following key components:

- Funding most interesting projects through a competitive grant process;
- Dissemination of best community development practices;
- Community development education;
- Creation of new community development instruments.

The primary goal of the Program is to create and disseminate both tested and new models of sustainable community development in all of Russia and, in particular, to work out

solutions in the following areas:

- Increasing civic awareness in the community and engaging community members in solving local critical issues through a competitive grant mechanism of projects promoting the introduction of energy-efficiency techniques and improving the social climate in the community, including economic development, public health improvement, rational use of natural resources, waste management, etc.;
- Development and introduction of energy efficiency instruments and mechanisms allowing to reinvest energy savings into development programs;
- Multi-stakeholder participation in defining community development priorities;
- Training community leaders, local officials and entrepreneurs;
- Dissemination of successful experience.

External experts and FSD staff reviewed all projects presented for the contest. The members of FSD Advisory Committee considered the projects proposed for funding and made funding decisions. A consortium of organizations was formed in each community participating in the contest to carry out project complexes.



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was founded to implement social-economic development programs and provide humanitarian assistance to over 100 countries. As part of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, USAID/Russia works with Russian organizations and people with the aim of promoting civil society.



FUND for SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Fund for Sustainable Development (FSD) is an independent not for profit Russian foundation created to implement programs addressing social and environmental issues and supporting socially responsible development throughout the Russian Federation. The key goal of FSD is to facilitate multi-sector cooperation in fulfilling targeted projects that emphasize sustainable regional and community development.



This ancient mosque in the Dagestan settlement Richi is one of the cultural monuments of the Agul People. A visit to the settlement is included in the tourist route developed as part of project activities

Eight project complexes (22 projects) became winners in the first round of the contest.

The project complex “The Future of Our Children” (Shchyokinsky Raion, Tula Oblast, project activities are intended for a period of one year, with total grant funding amounting to \$69,960) consists of four projects:

“Introduction of effective low-cost techniques reducing heat loss and heat consumption at Shchyokino City Children’s Hospital by replacing old window frames with new ones”;

“Heat supply modernization at Lev Tolstoy Gymnasium # 2 in Yasnaya Polyana” (replacement of the heating system);

“Improving the health of Shchyokino youth” (equipping the gym in Gymnasium #2);

“Practical ecomonitoring in environmental education”



The bridge in Sapitskaya Budka Park (Prigorodny Raion in the Republic of Northern Ossetia-Alania) will be renovated by a project of the second round

(introduction of a training course in ecology for the pupils of the school in Yasnaya Polyana; environmental monitoring; biodiversity studies and mastering bioindication skills; cleaning water bodies and land areas and planting trees and shrubs by the school’s environmental team).

The Project Complex Beslan: Light, Warmth and Kindness (intended for 10 months; total grant amount - \$70,000) includes four projects:

“Warmth for Children” (building a stand-alone automatic boiler plant in a kindergarten);

“Learning to Be Useful!” (training local youth in preparing and implementing social projects; holding a raion contest of projects; and organizing affordable family recreation and children’s ecotourism;

“Energy-Efficiency: Step by Step” (teaching children to control energy consumption at home, in school and in their community; disseminating this experience in other schools of the city and locality);



Edik and Alan from Beslan frequently visit the municipal stables, where they master equestrian skills and take care of the horses acquired under the Community Development Support Program

Project complex Promoting Environmentally Friendly Attitudes to Dagestan Nature and Resources (intended for 12 months; total amount of grants - \$64,840) includes three projects promoting community development in Agulsky Raion:

“A warm and light school for the children of Agulsky Raion!” (installation of plastic window units and doors and replacement of glow lamps with energy-efficiency ones at the local middle school);

“Modernization of the water supply system in the hospital in Tpig Settlement”;

“Mountain Wilderness: Dagestan’s Greatest Treasure” (this project is aimed at establishing a system of environmental education and ecotourism in the community and drawing the attention of environmental protection agencies to local conservation issues of this high-altitude region that lacks a single specially

protected nature area).

The project complex Pribaikalsky Raion – an Area of Sustainable Development (intended for 8 months; total grant amount - \$63,549) includes three projects:

“Modernization of the heat supply system in Kika School” (the replacement of wood burning stoves with combined gas-producers and wood-waste burning boilers at the school will result in a 93-ton reduction of hazardous emissions to the atmosphere and a 20% reduction of colds among the pupils);

“Sustainable tourism in Lake Baikal

Region and improvement of social and environmental conditions in the community” (organizing four international camps, building sections of the Great Baikal Trail, improving parks, removing trash, and training community members in the tourist services sphere, which is especially important in view of the creation in Pribaikalsky Raion of a Tourist and Recreation Special Economic Zone, one of the seven to appear in Russia in accordance with a recent decision of the Government);

“Addressing municipal social problems and founding a Local Community Fund (LCF) in Pribaikalsky Raion”.

Project complex Svrisk – a Sustainable and Comfortable Living Environment (this project, intended for 8 months and completed in Irkutsk Oblast, was granted \$51,243) consisted of three projects:

“Rational use of heat energy” (modernization of the municipal boiler plant in Mikroraion Settlement that allows to save 1 million rubles a year after converting the plant from coal-burning to the use of wood waste);

“Comfort in the outpatient clinic” (replacement of windows and doors in the building of the city’s clinic);

“Svrisk for You and for Everyone” (forming a Local Community Fund).

Project complex Creating a Favorable Living Environment in Vyazemsky Community, Khabarovsk Krai (intended for 11 months; total grant amount - \$58,249) includes five projects:

“Installation of energy-saving equipment at the central boiler plant in Vyazemsky”;

“Mercy” (improving conditions for the elderly and disabled inmates of the local retirement home);

“Improving the quality of medical treatment (ear, nose and throat) with the use of physical therapy equipment in remote villages”;

“A sound mind in a sound body” (creating better conditions for physical culture and athletic activities for children and youth);

“Books: companions for life” (improving conditions at the local library for community members, including the disabled).

Project complex Increasing the Quality of Life in Topolevo Community (completed in Khabarovsk Krai, was intended for 7 months; total grant amount - \$70,000) included four projects:

“Energy saving at Topolevo public lighting system”;

“Creation of an open-air cultural center in the community”;

“Modernization of an open-air sports complex in Topolevo Settlement”;

“Opening a gym for the youth”.

We mentioned seven of the eight winners in the first phase of the contest (the 20 projects of the six complexes, winners in the second phase of the contest held six months later, have also been announced) and would like to provide a more detailed description of the eighth project.

Project complex Valaam – Our Common Home includes five projects (project activities are intended for one year; total grant amount - \$61,655):

“Modernization of street lighting” (Sortavala City Administration is the entity in charge of this project) – replacing 300 old street lamps with new safe and energy-efficient ones. The energy savings (in 2007 estimated at 102,294 kW/h or 110,330 rubles; and in the 1st quarter of 2008 – 44,000 rubles) will be channeled to socially significant projects on Valaam and, firstly, to site improvement and organizing after-school activities for local schoolchildren.

“Valaam pottery workshop” (Valaam main general education school) is the basis of a cultural and educational project “The History of a Clay Pot”. The project acquired and installed equipment for the workshop and organized a school museum, which houses trainings and exhibitions. Many new samples of articles made of local clay will be created, three master classes and four excursions will be conducted, models of ceramic ware will be designed and regular training will be organized for local children.

“Green Island Environmental Site” (Valaam main general education school). This school project will build a tourist base camp

Valaam Island, one of Russia’s most famous nature and spiritual monuments, is located 40 km from the city of Sortavala and is part of Sortavala Municipality. The population of Sortavala is nearly 21,400 people, of whom 400 live on Valaam Island.

Following are just a few of the many critical problems facing the island: vague development prospects, frequent power setbacks, undeveloped land, poor quality of social services, inadequate water supply (shortage of drinking water and its poor quality), lack of stable communication with the mainland, absence of sports facilities, impossibility for local residents to undergo regular medical examinations, violations of forest use regulations, soil wash-out and degradation under atmospheric influence, no system of waste collection and recycling, water body pollution and poachery. Community members are not fully satisfied with the situation with local educational institutions and with the fact that quite often they are not informed of events that take place on the island and concern them directly.

When the community applied to scientists from St.Petersburg State University for advice on how to approach these problems and improve life on the island, the opinion that was provided was quite clear: to tackle social problems, promote economic development, and preserve the local unique nature, historical and cultural reserve was only possible in the framework of a sustainable development program.

O. Butovsky, FSD program director: *“On Valaam, the social, economic and conservation problems that require immediate solutions are more evident than in other places. The activities of the five projects of the complex facilitate close cooperation of all residents of the island in addressing these problems and also integration with local government and the Spaso-Preobrazhensky Monastery.”*

to develop ecotourism on the island, prepare a network of excursion and patrol routes, create a pilot school garden and a tree nursery, restore the old monastery’s gardens, organize lectures and lead excursions to nature landscapes and historical sites.

The school’s headmaster, V.Shishkin: *“The goal of these projects is to create a cultural and educational environment for the better development of children living on the island. This is the first instance of cooperation in this area.”*



“The Green Island Environmental Site” will be created on the school grounds by the staff of the local forestry, Valaam EcoCenter, the Light of Valaam Orthodox Cultural and Educational Center and the school’s management with the aim of expanding the pupil’s biological and environmental knowledge and teaching them gardening skills. The Arboretum will help to revive Valaam’s tradition of introducing new plants on the island.

“The Clay Workshop” project will create a school workshop for reviving the island’s pottery traditions. The pottery after-school group that appeared 5 years ago is now called Byzantine and is part of the Light of Valaam Center. The project, which involves, along with the school and the Light of Valaam Center, the Valaam Museum, will give rise to another form of working with children – museum educational activities – and will bring together parents, professionals and the community.”

“Playground” (Kindergarten # 15) is intended for preschoolers and elementary school pupils. The project will build a playground and assist the kindergarten in organizing methodological activities.

Head of the kindergarten, O. Golubtsova: *“For many years I wished that our kindergarten would have a bright colorful playground with different kinds of play equipment.*

“As a teacher, I realize how important it is for a child to have a chance to develop harmoniously, and exercise is one of the components of such development.

“Now we will be able to create an

attractive playing environment for the children, where they will enjoy special rights and where the usual adult prohibitions on children being too active are ineffective. Besides, the playground will create additional conditions for improving the children’s health.”

“Sustainable Development Leadership School” was intended for various sectors of the community, including local officials and entrepreneurs and included, in particular, three three-day seminars on the practical implementation of Valaam Sustainable Development Plan and also a two-week environmental camp for local schoolchildren and volunteers, students from St. Petersburg State University.

The coordinator of this project, D.Ermakov, head of department at the University of the Russian Academy of Education: *“Special emphasis in the course of this project*

was placed on working with the youth and children from Valaam Island, the city of Sortavala, St.Petersburg and Leningradskaya Oblast. Students, volunteers from St. Petersburg University, helped a lot with the project. At the summer environmental camp, schoolchildren, who were guided by experienced teachers, not only became better acquainted with the nature and conservation issues of the land where they live, but designed and implemented their own projects aimed at achieving small, but tangible improvements of the environment.”

The program of the camp, which, according to the participants, was both interesting and educational, was carried out by instructors and students from St.Petersburg State University who specialize in the field of sustainable development and environmental management, as well as by local professionals.



A modern playground was installed on this site. The dream of the head of the kindergarten O.Golubtsova has come true

Involved lessons were taught in an easy to understand form. Thus, teacher D.Yermakov acquainted the children with the basics of ecology and sustainable development in a game form. E. Nazarova, an engineer from Valaam Forestry, told the children many new and interesting things about the nature and conservation problems of Valaam. At the museum of the nature park, the children, attendees of the environmental camp, learned about the lives of the inhabitants of Lake Ladozhskoye and Valaam Archipelago from the E.Mikhailova.

At a quiz, everyone took part in estimating the number of hedgehogs on the island (the right answer was “zero”). The school’s headmaster, V.Shishkin, and senior keeper of Valaam Reserve Museum, L. Pechyorina, conducted a master class of creative work with natural materials. The master forester, D.Salenko, taught the children how to behave in a forest; and during his lessons, every child had a chance to build a bonfire or pitch a tent and was instructed to do this without harming nature or causing discomfort to other people.

“We want to hear the voice of each resident of the island and put together a general picture of Valaam today. We also want to learn about the community’s vision of its future and of what is to be done for the people’s hopes to come true.

“We want every resident of the island to have an opportunity to express his or her opinion on the most critical issues of community development and to make a contribution to practical activities improving life on the island.

“We will be informing you of all events and initiatives that take place under the project complex “Valaam Island – Our Common Home”.

“The summer and autumn will be a busy time on Valaam – project work will be in full swing in the local school, kindergarten, community center and summer tent camp.

“We invite everyone who is concerned about the fate of Valaam Island - a unique gem of Russia - to make a personal contribution to tackling the problems of this island by a sympathetic attitude, good advice or practical involvement. And, of course, we will be glad to receive your offers and proposals.

Initiative group of the project complex “Valaam – Our Common Home”

With help from professionals and with the participation of volunteer students, the children at the camp developed and fulfilled five projects aimed at improving the condition of the environment and enhancing the sustainability of the local community: “Environmental Trail”, “Clean Island”, “Ecotracks”, and “Environmental Landing Party”, and a performance of an environmental play for the local residents.

The participants in the camp, who had successfully mastered the program, were awarded special certificates.

To conclude this brief account of the important and interesting activities carried out in the framework of quite modest projects, which have noticeably changed the life of the community of this sacred Russian island, we would like to quote two more project participants.

I.Dementyev, vice-principal of St.Petersburg State University: *“Several instructors from the University took an active part in the project complex “Valaam – Our Common Home” and used their expertise in assisting the communities*



of Valaam and Sortavala in promoting sustainable development and disseminating acquired experience under the Sustainable Development and Ecomanagement Cooperation Program.”

Hieromonk Mefody, director of the Light of Valaam Orthodox Cultural and Educational Center: *“The Spaso-Preobrazhensky Russian Orthodox Stavropigialny Monastery gives its support to the project complex “Valaam – Our Common Home”. The Monastery and the Valaam Light Cultural and Education Center are very much concerned about the state of affairs in all spheres of life on the island and consider it expedient to unite the efforts of scientific, educational, public and business entities to address the problems of Valaam Island. We are convinced that this project complex has been instrumental in increasing civic awareness in the community and establishing interaction among all organizations operating on the island.”*

It seems that such a unanimous evaluation of a group of small, but very useful projects is the best guarantee of a successful continuance of changes that have been initiated this summer on the island.

We hope that these small projects will lead to important improvements in the lives of all Program participants and will help them make their first steps in the direction of sustainable development!