

Traditional Knowledge and its Value for Biodiversity Conservation

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Main idea: Strengthen biodiversity conservation in the Kamchatka and maintain the cultural heritage of indigenous peoples of the North by integrating traditional knowledge into process of biodiversity conservation in Kamchatka. Enhancing the role of indigenous peoples in biodiversity conservation process and natural resources use and find new methods of applying traditional ecological knowledge to the management processes.

Indigenous peoples' knowledge is believed to be a part of the ecological system and therefore, the research results of ecosystem can be quite questionable when research does not go along with the investigation of indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge. Indigenous peoples' folklore can contribute a lot to the efforts in creating the system of an ecological education. Traditional myths reflect the ecological mentality of indigenous peoples and their close relationship with the Nature.

Indigenous peoples of the North are reviving their traditions and customs such as national dances, ceremonies, music in which expresses ideas and sentiments about the natural environment. The knowledge contained and expressed in these artistic forms can be used to deepen understanding of biological diversity. Oral histories, legends, fare-tales and narratives of hunting, fishing and gathering comprise an invaluable records of peoples' knowledge, innovations and practices relevant to conservation of biodiversity.

Throughout the history of Kamchatka the Northern Peoples have been involved in salmon fisheries as well as in other forms of natural resource use, and have been directly dependant on the return of salmon for food. Annually Pacific salmon migrated from the ocean back to spawning rivers. Spawning seasons were usually accompanied by phenological phenomena tied to climatic and other factors. Salmon, the main source of sustenance for the Indigenous peoples of Kamchatka played an absolutely important role in various aspects of their ethnological being. Studies of these aspects should be built on available databases and findings resulted from new sessions with the holders of traditional knowledge.

The significance of this traditional knowledge's heritage for biodiversity has not fully been realized and mostly, due to the lack of information concerning the biological role of this knowledge for indigenous peoples subsistence.

The availability and simplicity of this knowledge in the form of traditional narratives and fare-tales will allow the youth of further generations to enlarge and enrich their knowledge. The understanding of traditional peoples' religions and their modern interpretations should help descendants of Kamchatka indigenous peoples to interpret the cultural wealth of their ancestors. Therefore, systematic recordings of indigenous peoples' knowledge and data resulted from data experts' work shall give us an opportunity to demonstrate the use of traditional knowledge in the process of biodiversity conservation from the long-term perspective.

Salmon biodiversity conservation might not have been regarded by indigenous peoples as a challenge, but they have always known of an important role that salmon played in their lives.

They treated salmon with respect and protected it naturally by applying traditional alleviating techniques to the fishing process. Fishing traditions that local people established tell us about fishing tools and techniques; methods of fish processing, and about the intensity of salmon consumption. Undoubtedly, local peoples have developed their specific approaches to protect and use effectively natural resources, including salmon. This is why, it is necessarily important to analyse not only salmon fishery-related records, but records containing the knowledge about protection of all elements of salmon ecosystem. Analyzing of folk superstitions about natural phenomena and lean seasons can also answer many questions.

Before the beginning of the 20 century, customs such as the following existed among the Itelmen: after cleaning ice from the river, they lowered a salted fish into the water and watched it. If the fish moved down the river it was a good sign there would be a lot of fish but if the fish stuck to the bank it was a bad sign.

Ritual festivals dedicated to celebrating salmon still exist among indigenous peoples of the Kamchatka. One of the most well known is the First Fish Festival. Which is held both towns and smaller settlements. The main features of the ceremonies are similar though there are local differences. A place near a spawning river is chosen, and participants build a small fire there. The tribal shaman, or chosen elders, leads the ceremony. He throws animals fur and herbs into fire, while thanking nature for fish and lucky fishing season. They also throw pieces of pie, fish and candies into river as offerings. As a rule the festival is held in July (Sharakhmatova V.N., The Current Situation of Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Fishing in the Kamchatka River Valley: problems and solutions (1900 to the present) http://www.siberian-studies.org/publications/PDF/sharakhmatova2004_E.pdf).

Learning of indigenous customs and traditions will produce exciting results and create a valuable knowledge basis that incites local and newly arrived population to think ecologically. The aim to made ecological knowledge available and popular with local populations. Traditionally, values and behaviors with regard to biodiversity conservation have often been shared and transmitted through rituals, songs, dances and corresponding materials representations (objects, ornaments etc). Such themes are nowadays expressed again by contemporary artists and at revitalized ethnic festivals, which direct attention to native world views of the peoples of that area.

Studying of archaic beliefs and their contemporary interpretations should encourage the descendents of Kamchatka indigenous peoples to recollect the system of cultural wealth produced by their ancestors. Therefore, systematic filling of TEK data collected by experts from indigenous peoples will allow us to develop biodiversity conservation and biodiversity-oriented managerial strategies and then to demonstrate how to apply these strategies in the process of biodiversity conservation. This will also allow us to popularize TEK among local population and interested individuals who can correct it or use for their own research. TEK also needs to be studied from the perspective of law issues based on customary law and traditions (Sharakhmatova V.N., Kamchatka Indigenous Peoples' Salmon Biodiversity and River Ecosystems Ecological Knowledge Maintenance and Conservation Program http://www.kamchatkasalmon.ru/our_programs/ConservationProgram.pdf).

In the present context of an implicit danger that TEK may become extinct it is becoming extremely important to record the knowledge with the application of new techniques and to adopt it for use by public of all social groups.

It is very important to take into consideration and analyse TEK and traditional use of natural resources, based on culture and perspective of indigenous peoples, under conditions of global climate changes as well as local industrial, socio-political and economic influence.

- Collection of information on TEK, traditional nature use lands, indigenous people's tribal lands in the past and present.
- Research on the influence of climate, environmental and socio-economic factors on reindeer breeding, traditional fishing and other types of traditional natural resources use.

The development process is in the direction of gradual integration of the indigenous population into large social and economic structures. There are many such groups in isolation, which means the preservation of traditional way of life is in close harmony with environmental nature. Their survival depends on traditional natural management, on ecological isolation and adaptation to modern conditions. But their isolation also means that few of them agree with national economic and social development, which has negative effects on their health, food and education.

Now the indigenous peoples keep traditional life styles of economy and natural management to a great extent. The close communication with nature is vital for them to preserve originality and survival in the modern world.

The processes of public development of indigenous peoples of the North, Kamchatka and other northern areas of Russia do not differ much even taking into consideration all the ethnic, natural and environmental peculiarities of each nation.

The ecological systems they live in are the most essential integral component for the indigenous peoples is an irreplaceable form of ability to live.

It is necessary to create legal and economic mechanisms ensuring that indigenous peoples that they have the opportunity to use natural complexes and apply traditional knowledge by gradual introduction of socio-economic and scientific and technical innovation.

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