

# The Role of Northern Women in Globalization

NATALIA OKHLOPKOVA

---

*The Northern Review* #22 (Winter 2000): 50-51.

---

Globalization is a modern tendency of world development that has been taking place over the last few decades. This tendency has been determined by the growing correlation and interdependence of states, as well as the integration of national economies. Northern regions of the world are amongst the key areas of interest with respect to this globalization process due to such factors as geographical location, economic perspectives, and similarities as they concern the problems of development.

The position of women in traditional northern societies was particularly high; however, with growing economic civilization that position has significantly deteriorated. Globalization is now enhancing the role of women in promoting mutual understanding and cooperation between indigenous populations of the North. The Circumpolar Women's Conference attests to the growing awareness of the present roles and future potential of women in the North under changing conditions currently happening worldwide.

Recognizing that, within the historical process of development, the modern world has experienced a strong tendency toward globalization, leads to several conclusions. First, for any tendency there must be a counter-tendency. Second, regional integration is the first step of globalization. Third, women can make a difference in the new climate of global change.

During the period of transition to an open market economy within Russia,

the process of globalization within this country began. The northern regions of Russia, which encompass about 70 percent of its territory and more than 12 million people of its overall population, are in critical position with respect to survival and to finding their place in the future. The position of women may even become worse with growing changes.

In the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), as in the Russian North as a whole, de-population has been taking place within the last few years. In 1991, the population of the republic was 1.121 million. By 1999, it had decreased to just 988,500. Unemployment among women is rising, with women comprising about 60 percent of those registered as unemployed. The educational level among women is also declining. In 1994, 19.7 percent of all students at institutes of high education and professional training were women. By 1996, the number had dropped to 17.6 percent. As well, in 1997, 13.5 percent of women worked at places without proper sanitary facilities.

At the same time, the role of women is growing in the new sectors of the economy. About 70 percent of small- and medium-sized businesses in Russia are now led by women. The role of women in the household economy is more officially recognized. For instance, in the Russian North, a position that has always existed is finally being recognized in the wage economy. It is that of the *chum* [a kind of tent] worker (hostess), who works and travels with people who continue to lead a nomadic existence.

With respect to the labour market and the globalization process, the role of the International Labour Organization (ILO) has been great. Its INDISCO program (an interregional program to support self-reliance of Indigenous and tribal communities through cooperatives and other self-help organizations) was started in 1993. It is aimed at coordinating the forces of indigenous populations with respect to questions of modern development. In the Sakha Republic (Yakutia), we have undertaken some pilot projects to develop em-

ployment among Aboriginal peoples of the North.

The role of women in the globalization process must increase. Without the active participation of women in the sphere of international cooperation, and especially among northern regions, sustainable development is impossible. We must share and exchange our experiences to create greater opportunities for the future of the North, to enrich culture, economic prosperity, and to strengthen our forces in cooperation.

Natalia Okhlopkova is a Professor in the Faculty of Economics at the Yakutsk State University in Yakutsk, Russia.