


# Chapter 15

## Sustainable Development of Rural Areas in Russia: Legal and Technological Support



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**Abstract** The chapter examines the legal category “sustainable development of rural areas” and gives its authors’ definition. The authors suggest meaning by sustainable development of rural areas the regular economic activities on agricultural lands, providing growth of agricultural production, under condition that social rights of residents of rural settlements are properly guaranteed, as well as measures protecting the environment on agricultural land (including measures for farmland fertility) are taken in rural settlements as well. As a result of the study, it is noted that the transition of rural areas to sustainable development is hampered by the lack of an efficient system of interdepartmental interaction and coordination of specific issues related to the development of rural areas. In comparison with developed countries, government support for agriculture in Russia is significantly lower, what can be considered as one of the factors of a low profitability of agriculture. Poor support limits the possibilities of modernization and innovative development of the industry, negatively affects wages of workers in the industry and the tax base of local budgets. The authors study the problems and prospects for the development of agricultural tourism as one of

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the most important elements of transition of rural areas to sustainable development, identifying the reasons for its insufficiently rapid and effective development. This chapter also shows that the Concept of Sustainable Development of Rural Areas can be a tool to mitigate the severity of social, economic, and environmental problems in rural areas, taking into account the interests of citizens, business, and the government. A complex and multi-level system of criteria and indicators for sustainable development of rural areas is required for an efficient realization of this concept offered in this chapter.

## 15.1 Materials

The legal framework for the study was made up of international and national legal acts dedicated to various aspects of sustainable development. The chapter examines the UN declarations adopted at various conferences on sustainable development, UN resolutions, and decisions of EU bodies. Special attention is paid to the constitutions of various countries of the world, what reflect certain provisions of the concept of sustainable development, as well as the Constitution and legislation of the Russian Federation.

The authors analyze the provisions of the Urban Planning Code of the Russian Federation, federal laws “On environmental protection”, “On development of agriculture”, “On viticulture and winemaking in the Russian Federation”, as well as some secondary legislation, for example, the Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of 02.02.2015 “On approval of the Strategy for sustainable development of rural areas of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030” [4–6, 14, 16].

In the course of the study, the papers of Russian and foreign authors devoted to both general provisions on sustainable development and specific features of the concept of sustainable development of rural areas were used. In particular, the chapter deals with the papers of [1, 2, 9–12, 17–19] and a number of other authors devoted to certain aspects of sustainable development.

## 15.2 Methods

The study used general scientific methods (formal and logical, dialectical, systemic and structural, critical knowledge). When interpreting the research results, the methods of synthesis, classification, and generalization were used. The work also used such private scientific methods as formal legal, method of assessment of legal processes, method of comparative analysis, etc.

### 15.3 Introduction

Rural territories of the Russian Federation are the most important resource of the country, the value of which is rapidly growing in the context of deepening globalization, while the importance of natural and territorial resources in the development of the country increases. The development of rural areas today is extremely uneven, while rural areas have vast natural, demographic, economic, historical, and cultural potential, the rational use of which can ensure sustainable development, a decent level and quality of life for the rural population. The implementation of nationwide functions of rural areas is hampered by the structural crisis associated with the transformation of forms of ownership and the transfer of activities in all spheres of life to market principles. Currently, the share of people employed in the main sectors of the rural economy (agriculture, forestry, fish farming) has significantly decreased, but agriculture in most administrative regions continues to be an important sphere of employment of the rural population. At the same time, wages in agriculture over the past years were on average consistently two times lower than the average rate for the economy, what causes a number of deformations in the development of the social sphere.

In rural areas, the share of poor families is higher. While the share of the rural population of the total population is 26%, the share of families with per capita incomes below the subsistence level in rural areas is more than 40% of the total number of low-income families. If the prevailing trends in the development of rural areas, characterized by a low quality and standard of living, continue, the outflow of the most promising young people will continue, what is confirmed by sociological studies, according to which 50% of young people intend to leave the rural areas in which they permanently reside. The consequence of this is the degradation of human potential of rural areas, and when the labor force is attracted on a rotational basis, there is an increase in social tensions.

In such a situation, comprehensive diversification of the rural economy, support for farming and alternative forms of employment and self-employment are required. The support measures are expected to include the support for development of crafts and agricultural tourism, organization, and removal of administrative barriers to product marketing, access facilitation to natural resources, including land, material, financial and information resources, support for the activities of consulting centers and the development of infrastructure that allows the population to receive a decent income. The achievement of this task can be facilitated by the fact that Russia has a large land potential for agriculture. As of January 1, 2014, the area of agricultural land was 220.2 million hectares, including the area of arable land 121.5 million hectares. Despite such potential opportunities for the development of agriculture, in recent years there has been a tendency to reduce the area of agricultural land, which is caused by the unsatisfactory financial and economic situation of agricultural producers. In turn, this situation results in the rejection of the provided land, the transfer of land to other categories for building in suburban areas, the lack of measures for land reclamation and restoration of soil fertility. This situation is aggravated by environmental factors

caused, on the one hand, by long-term extensive forms of agriculture, leading to soil depletion, and, on the other hand, by climate changes leading to an increase in risk of agricultural production [14].

These trends require further improvement of the concept of sustainable development of rural areas, taking into account the differentiated problems of rural residents and different levels of agricultural development in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation. Such a concept of sustainable development of rural areas should create conditions for ensuring a stable improvement in the quality and standard of living of the rural population based on the advantages of the rural lifestyle, which will develop the social and economic potential of rural areas and ensure that they perform national functions such as production, demographic, spatial, and communication in order to preserve historical and cultural foundations of the identity of the peoples of the country, to guarantee social control and the development of rural areas in Russia.

### ***15.3.1 Main Provisions of the Concept of Sustainable Development of Rural Areas in International Law and Russian Legislation***

The concept of sustainable development is one of the most discussed ideas of interaction between nature and society. It was first mentioned in 1987 in the report of the International Commission on Environment and Development, but it is finalized in the decisions of several UN Conferences on Environmental Protection [3]. In their decisions, “sustainable” means such a progressive development of the state and society, which ensures a balance of economic, environmental, and social needs of all private and public entities in the interest of the present and future generations [8]. It is thanks to the documents adopted at such UN conferences (starting with the decisions of the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992) that the quality of the environment (along with the level of economic and social development) for the first time began to be considered as an essential element of sustainable development. The obligation of the state to preserve ecosystems and ecological processes that are vital for the biosphere of a country, to protect biological diversity, and to observe the principle of optimal sustainability when using biological resources and living ecosystems is now added to the economic and social obligations of the state which existed before after the recognition of the concept of sustainable development on a global scale.

These ideas were fully developed in the materials of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002.

The 2002 Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development focused on poverty eradication, changing production, and consumption patterns, and the protection and sound use of natural resources as the main goals and needs of sustainable development. The decisions of the conference also highlighted the difference in opportunities for sustainable development for developed and developing countries.

The decisions of the UN Conference on Environment and Development “Rio + 20”, which took place in 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, it was continued to analyze the issues of poverty eradication and measures to ensure sustainable development. At the same time, the term “green economy” was used for the first time in the decisions of the conference. Building a “green” economy in all countries of the world will mean ensuring the sound use of natural resources with the lowest losses for the environment, increasing the efficiency of their use and reducing the volume of generated waste.

Discussion of sustainable development strategies continued further, with special emphasis on the UN General Assembly Resolution of September 25, 2015 “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” [15]. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals presented in this document were developed and supplemented in subsequent UN documents, for example, in the UN Sustainable Development Goals Report (2017). All these and many other documents contain a detailed set of criteria and indicators of sustainable development, and an algorithm for achievement of these goals through the efforts of the national authorities and the public.

These recommendations were accepted both by interstate associations (for example, in the European Union) and by nations in the world. Thus, on January 30, 2019, the European Commission presented a document entitled.

“Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030”, which summarizes the progress made in Europe and identifies the necessary priorities for moving forward: development of a circular economy, creation of a sustainable food system, ecologization of energy, mobility and man-made environment, and use of a range of instruments starting from education and digitization to finance and taxation which facilitate the transition to sustainable development. The document emphasizes the idea that without social sustainability there can be no sustainable development; therefore, it is fundamentally important to ensure social justice in the transition to sustainability, for the benefit of all, leaving no one behind.

At the national level, the provisions of the concept of sustainable development had different relevance in the national constitutions, as well as legislative acts of the countries of the world. The most explicit manifestation of the interest to sustainable development is the mention of sustainable development in the following constitutions: Article 17 of the 2010 Constitution of the Dominican Republic, Article 8 of the 1997 Constitution of Eritrea, and Art. 60 of the 2010 Constitution of Kenya, article 22 of the 2008 Constitution of the Republic of Maldives, article 81 of the 1976 Portuguese Constitution, article 33 of the 2003 Constitution of the State of Qatar, article 13 of the 1998 Constitution of the Republic of Sudan and a number of others (Environmental provisions of constitutions, 2012). The Constitution of the Russian Federation does not mention sustainable development; however, this legal category can be found in several federal laws, in particular, in the Civil Code of the Russian Federation (Articles 1, 30, 41, and a number of others), Art. 1, 3, and 36 of the Federal Law “On Environmental Protection”, Article 36 of the Federal Law of December 27, 2019 No. 468-FZ “On Viticulture and Winemaking in the Russian Federation”, as

well as in several development strategies of the country (on the sustainable development of rural areas, sustainable development of tourism, development of indigenous peoples, etc.).

Federal Law of December 29, 2006 No. 264-FZ “On the Development of Agriculture” under the sustainable development of rural areas means their stable social and economic development, increase in agricultural production, increase in the efficiency of agriculture, achievement of full employment of the rural population and increase in their standard of living, sound use of land. Thus, the main emphasis here is made on social and economic aspects, while the environmental factor did not come to the attention of the legislator.

It follows from this description that Russian legislation lacks a balanced concept of transition to sustainable development of rural areas (although its specific aspects are undoubtedly reflected in laws and subordinate laws). International acts provide for the adoption (to track the implementation of the provisions of the idea of sustainable development) at the national level a number of special criteria and indicators showing the degree of compliance of legislation and the state of economic, environmental and social interests with the goals stated in the Concept. In the Russian Federation, the most developed are the criteria and indicators of sustainable development in forestry [1], as well as in the use and protection of wildlife [9]. For other sectors of public life (agriculture, transport, waste management, etc.), criteria and indicators exist only in scientific research.

Thus, the concept of sustainable development is directly connected with economic, environmental, and social spheres in their indissoluble unity, and also affects other spheres, including political, ideological, informational, cultural, and others [18]. It is necessary to support the suggested classification of measures to ensure sustainable development of agricultural territories by subject and object criteria. From the point of view of the subject, the taken measures are as seen follows. First, these are steps taken by government in form of competent authorities. Second, the measures are taken by agricultural producers themselves. Third, it is society as a whole which influences the process in the economy. From the point of view of the object, it is suggested to distinguish organizational, legal, economic, environmental, social, ethical, informational, and educational measures [11].

The mechanism identification for their implementation requires a study of narratives, both of the category “sustainable development of rural areas” and the criteria (indicators) of its development, including the definition of priority areas for sustainable development of rural areas in the Russian Federation.

### ***15.3.2 Issue of Criteria and Indicators of Sustainable Development***

The issue of the transition to sustainable development standards for rural areas during its discussion inevitably results in a discussion about its criteria and indicators. In

recent years, a number of judgments on this issue have already been expressed in the agrarian science and law of the post-Soviet countries.

In particular, representatives of the Belarusian agrarian science and law suggest to measure the level of unemployment in rural areas, size of wages and general standard of living of rural residents, provision of rural residents with housing and infrastructure (kindergartens, hospitals, etc.), taking into account the gasification and supply of drinking water, roads, etc. [2]. Meanwhile, for all the value of this approach, the authors focus on the social parameters of life of rural residents, while the idea of sustainable development involves finding a balance of three groups of interests—economic, social, and environmental ones. It follows from this description that this approach needs to be supplemented by two more interest groups.

Russian scientists, in turn, often focus on economic interests at the expense of social and environmental ones. Thus, Ostrovsky, speaking about economic indicators of sustainable development of rural areas, adds to them international cooperation as a means of acceleration development of rural areas, changes in consumption characteristics, development of a financing mechanism for rural areas, introduction of environmentally friendly technologies in rural areas [13].

When analyzing environmental criteria and indicators, a number of scientists reasonably suggest analyzing the proportion of unused lands of agricultural organizations as environmental indicators of sustainability; soil fertility of arable land (average level of humus in the soils of arable land); total pesticide load per hectare of arable land; share of agricultural land used for organic production in the total land area; proportion of degraded drained land with peat soils in the total area of agricultural land; proportion of disturbed lands in the total area of lands of agricultural firms; and share of waste generated in agriculture in the total amount of waste [10].

Other authors, examining environmental criteria and indicators of sustainable development of rural areas, suggest criteria such as the state of soil fertility, level of emissions and discharges of harmful substances, and degree of use of pesticides and agrochemicals. Within the framework of social criteria, attention is paid to the employment of population, wages, vocational training of rural residents, intensity of use of rural labor resources, labor protection, development of health care in the countryside, and the preservation of the cultural landscape [7].

Thus, representatives of various scientific schools usually focus on only one group of interests (economic, environmental, and social) in the triad of sustainable development, while the urgent task is to build their balance, taking into account all three areas of sustainable development. Undoubtedly, the discussion about criteria and indicators should be continued, since they make it possible to assess not only the achievement of specific economic, environmental, or social goals but also make it possible to identify the extent to which the development of specific rural areas (for example, within the boundaries of a settlement or a municipal district) generally corresponds to the specified parameters of sustainable development set by federal or regional authorities, they allow assessing the effectiveness of the taken measures applied to achieve the specified indicators.

In our opinion, in the light of the existing international and foreign experience, the criteria for sustainable development of rural areas should look as follows. Economic

criteria: technology level in the production of organic products of plant growing, animal husbandry and fish farming; competitiveness of agricultural products of a certain country, their demand in the world agricultural market; development of agricultural entrepreneurship in a particular region (municipality) or the country as a whole; development of markets for agricultural products, including cooperative forms; construction of roads and other infrastructure facilities in rural areas; dynamics of income growth of agricultural entrepreneurs, including the measures for state support of agriculture (loans, subsidies, etc.); use of renewable energy in rural areas (including biofuel production); number of facilities used for agricultural tourism; amount of unused land in the region (country).

Social criteria: population size (indicators of birth rate, mortality, population migration); provision of utilities; income of the rural population; dynamics of increase/decrease in the number of social facilities (kindergartens, schools, hospitals, cultural facilities) in the municipality (region); jobs growth in the region (municipality); growth of the construction of social housing in the municipality (region); number of dilapidated and dangerous housing, modern residential buildings built in their place; access of the population of rural areas to the means of communication (development of the Internet system); rural crime level; and development of the retail chain.

Environmental criteria: effectiveness of soil conservation measures; preservation of rural landscapes; growth of the system of protective afforestation; availability in the region (municipality) of program documents on adaptation to climate change; quality of drinking water within the boundaries of the municipality; measures for the protection of aquatic biological resources; presence / absence of unregistered waste dumps in the municipality; condition of hydraulic structures; and reclamation systems in the municipality.

### ***15.3.3 Rural Tourism as One of Directions of Transition to Sustainable Development of Rural Areas***

Agricultural tourism, which appeared in a number of European countries back in the 1970s of the last century, becomes more and more popular every year. Its appearance is a typical example (and proof) of the multi-purpose character of agricultural activities, which should not be limited to the cultivation of crops or livestock. The development of this direction of agricultural activity is the most characteristic manifestation of the dynamics of sustainable development of rural areas, since it allows balancing all three groups of interests, i.e., economic, environmental, and social ones.

In scientific papers, there are several approaches to understanding rural tourism, its goals and objectives. Thus, some authors believe that rural tourism is one of the branches of agriculture, within the framework of which rural residents are employed to make a profit organization when organizing rest and recreation. At the same time, two types of agricultural tourism are distinguished. The first one is carried



out in small forms of agricultural business (for example, within the boundaries of personal subsidiary plots of citizens). The second one involves the opening of rural tourist villages, centers, and complexes [19]. Others write that rural tourism “is a purposeful travel to rural areas with relatively undisturbed ecosystems and ethnic and cultural complexes, providing a direct contribution to the solution of the issues of rural population and are subject to an adequate management regime based on sustainable development” [17].

The issue of rural tourism is connected with the issue of the boundaries of “rural areas”. The fact is that the legislation does not provide a clear answer to the question: are rural areas the lands of rural settlements, or agricultural lands outside their borders? Is it advisable to set their boundaries, and if so, in what order? Without solving this issue, it is impossible to implement effectively the norms of urban planning, natural resources, environmental and other legislation regulating the participation of rural residents in planning the development of these territories and their resources [12]. When discussing this issue, it should be noted that the most optimal interpretation of the category “agricultural territory” is as follows. It is part of the territory of the Russian Federation located outside the boundaries of urban districts and cities of federal significance, whose residents are mainly engaged in agricultural production.

Taking into account this more precise definition, it is advisable to understand rural tourism as a type of activity carried out in rural areas aimed at providing tourists with a range of services for accommodation, food, recreation, and excursions within rural landscapes, with the possibility of voluntary participation of guests in certain traditional methods of farming (horse breeding, fishing, cooking, caring for farm animals, etc.).

The positive sides of rural tourism are economic development (profits of local firms, taxes, real estate construction, souvenirs production, food stuff production, etc.); social aspect (increase of employment of rural population, incomes’ growth and living standards of rural population, demand for educational programs and master classes of organizers of agricultural tourism, decrease in the outflow of population to cities, preservation of the traditional peasant way of life); environmental aspect (implementation of programs for protection of land and other natural objects otherwise tourists will not come; production of environmentally friendly products and mitigation of the effects of chemicalization of agriculture; conditions for a healthy lifestyle for local residents).

One of the most characteristic features of agricultural tourism as a type of environmental and agricultural entrepreneurship is the lack of the need for large capital investments, since this type of recreation does not imply high-class hotels, swimming pools, expensive tourist infrastructure facilities (restaurants, casinos, etc.).

This activity allows entrepreneurs to show some flexibility. Rural tourism can act as the only type of activity for them, or be a source of additional income, when the entrepreneur is limited only to the accommodation of the tourist, and the tourist organizes excursions and recreation to his own will.

Meanwhile, the full development of this type of entrepreneurship is hindered by a number of objective and subjective reasons, including the following ones: political

reason (reluctance of the authorities to fight corruption effectively, reduce the bureaucratic burden on business, pursue an effective tax and credit policy); economic reason (poverty of rural residents, lack of startup capital, as well as business skills); social reason (inactivity, alcoholism, low level of education and culture); legal reason (lack of a regulatory framework for the development of agricultural tourism, information and coordination of such activities, efficient judicial system that allows entrepreneurs to protect their rights).

In these conditions, the agrarian policy of the Russian government requires certain adjustments. Given that the support for rural tourism is not included in the list of government measures limited by the WTO agreements, measures of support for rural tourism at the federal and regional levels could contribute to the solution of three main issues in the agricultural sector: soil conservation, sustainable development of the rural economy, as well as the solution of social problems in the countryside.

## 15.4 Conclusion

The study showed that “sustainable development of rural areas” should be understood as a stable implementation of economic activities on agricultural land, growth of agricultural production, provided that the social rights of rural residents are properly guaranteed, as well as measures are taken to protect the environment on agricultural lands (including measures of preservation of the fertility of agricultural land) and in rural areas.

The transition of rural areas to sustainable development is hampered by the lack of an efficient system of interdepartmental interaction and coordination of individual issues connected with the development of rural areas.

Compared to developed countries, government support for agriculture in Russia is significantly lower, what is one of the factors of low profitability of agriculture, and the lack of support limits the possibilities of modernization and innovative development of the industry, negatively affects the level of remuneration of workers in the industry and the size of the tax base of local budgets. Development of a vital infrastructure for health care and education aims at economic efficiency at the expense of the population's access to these essential social services, what in fact leads to the violation of the constitutional rights of villagers to health care and education. The infrastructural development of rural areas in Russia, especially the road network and modern communications, is proceeding at a pace that does not allow in the near future overcoming the existing spatial and communication gap between the city and the countryside.

Departmental barriers which hinder the availability of development resources for the rural population remain. The reform of local self-government did not lead to the creation of the institution of rural self-government, which has sufficient funds to solve the problems of the rural population. Civil society institutions are poorly developed in rural areas. The loss of rural traditional culture is not recognized by society as a problem that deserves attention and there are no public resources helping

to overcome it; as a result, unique monuments of the material and intangible heritage of the peoples of Russia, which serve as the basis of their identity, are destroyed and then disappear. Life in rural areas is not attractive for young people. The outflow of young people from rural areas to cities is a serious obstacle to the formation of a human resources base for rural development.

The lack of an effective system of environmental supervision, as well as the poverty of rural residents, entail poor use of modern agricultural technologies and fertilizers, increase in the number of abandoned and unused lands, and also lead to the appearance of illegal waste dumps.

The concept of sustainable development of rural areas can be a tool to mitigate the severity of social, economic, and environmental problems in rural areas, balancing the interests of citizens, business, and government. For an efficient realization of this idea, a complex and multi-level system of criteria and indicators for sustainable development of rural areas is required and they are suggested in this chapter.

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