Boosting sustainability policy in Russia

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Russia is the largest country in the world, covering more than one-eighth of the Earth's inhabited land area. So it is in everyone's interest to see that its lawmakers deliver sound policies when it comes to environmental sustainability.

Recently times have been tough, however, and interest in economic growth has taken centre stage, with concerns about the environment

being pushed into the background.

Under the EU-funded SUST-RUS project ('Spatial-economic-ecological model for the assessment of sustainability policies of Russia'), researchers set out to develop an integrated, state-of-the-art modelling approach that could assist Russian policy makers in their choice of short-, medium- and long-term sustainability policies.

To achieve this, project researchers, led by Russia's Centre for Economic and Financial Research, first developed the new modelling approach itself.

They then developed a set of sustainability indicators associated with the model, allowing the quantification of the social, economic and environmental effects of sustainability policies.

Finally, the team used the model to assess the potential effects of a set of important sustainability policy measures, thus demonstrating the capabilities and reliability of the approach.

Crucially, SUST-RUS project partners say they wanted to create an open source model that could be used by both Russian and European researchers. The resulting model considers sustainability in terms of social, economic and environmental outlook, over the short term - one to two years - or over the long term - five to six years.

When the SUST-RUS team ran the model to assess the energy efficiency of natural gas, they concluded that pricing policy should be favourable to both producers and consumers in order to have a real impact on efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions.

The project subsequently recommended the removal of state subsidies for gas consumers and a decrease in subsidies for industrial producers.

These recommendations are now being put into practice by the Russian government.

The SUST-RUS modelling approach provides Russia and the international community with sound scientific support for formulating sustainability policies, balancing social, economic and environmental objectives. It received EUR 1.3 million in EU funding, and ran for three years between 2009 and 2011.

More information: SUST-RUS sust-rus.org/

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