

35b Understanding and Communicating Sustainability: Global Versus Regional

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Sustainability in its present connotation is a Western concept that has emerged in the West and largely represents the attitudes of the developed world. Systems in the developing countries are in transition that is further promoted by globalization. They are foreign to sustainability because by definition they are apt to change rather than maintenance, they are either in the release or renewal stages that hardly anybody wishes to sustain, or have just entered the growth stage. Sustainability is enticing for the developed economic systems, which have reached the conservation phase, and would rather endure this stage. In communicating the knowledge of sustainability it is essential to adapt to the local specifics and redefine sustainability accordingly. Local sustainability can be ensured only by borrowing energy, resources and adaptive potential from outside of the system, or by decreasing the sustainability of the global system. Sustainability of a subsystem is achieved at the expense of the supersystem or other subsystems. Therefore institutions that are to maintain life support systems on this planet need to emphasize global priorities and test policies and strategies against the sustainability of the biosphere, rather than regional or local sustainability. We illustrate these ideas with our findings in the Kola Peninsula (Russia) and in the Mekong watershed.