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Experience in soil and water conservation –
the role of intangibles in the motivation of land user and expert.

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Abstract

For areas of mountains where changes in society often have an influence that penetrates later than in more accessible parts of countries, it may be an opportunity to emphasize human values of personal conviction and motivation derived from faith. These incentives become more valuable and important, the more economic considerations tend to dominate world affairs. In the present process of globalisation this becomes more critical.

The importance of intangible incentives becomes apparent for instance in projects of soil conservation in third world countries. Certain traditions and conviction derived from faith can contribute to effective care for the land, but have often not been recognised when a strict economic view was applied to planning. In other cases these incentives have been discarded in planning.

The case of Swiss alpine farming

The farmer's management is important for the prevention of avalanches and for the upkeep of the landscape for tourism. But also strong intangible incentives play an important role. During

financial advice to an alpine farmer's family it appeared that the cost of living was estimated five times higher than it actually was. It shows that the conviction about this way of farming entails real high opportunity costs (Bergsma 2000).

The president of the Swiss Alp Management Association (Alpwirtschaftsverein) concluded after an international meeting on alpine pastures and meadows held in Austria in 1982 by saying that next to the technological development and economic considerations, also the spirit, the attitude, the customs and traditions of the Alp pasture farm household need an equal weight in decisions of policy (Schwackhofer et al. 1982).



A Swiss Alp farm in Saanenland

There is an attitude of deep attachment to the Alp. "These fields and this house we do not want to leave. We value it also very much for the education of our children."

Motivation of land users and experts– conclusions from experience in third world projects.

In activities aimed at improvement of rural development in a third world country, the viewpoint of the expert may easily dominate plans because of his position in projects. A wise general conclusion is made by Hudson (1993, p. 3) : 'It would be good to look for what exactly is the motivation of the land users, and not discard what we ourselves may not feel'.

Peasant economies do not operate according to the economic laws assumed by neo-classical economists. For example, risk minimisation and family subsistence, rather than profit maximisation, constitutes a fundamental principle. Therefore sound economic analysis must be broader than the conventional cost-benefit analysis (Tobisson 1993, p.61).

In developing countries the partial acceptance or complete refusal of advice for soil and water conservation is often attributed to the backwardness and stubbornness of the land users. This analysis is deficient. Less attention has focussed on the attitude of the expert who gives the advice. His limited understanding of the non-material motivations of the land users has contributed its share to inappropriate advice.

The viewpoint of experts in the third world may be put forward by such a convincing analysis of local questions, that it suggests to encompass all essential points, even when aiming only at a partial sector of the well being of the people involved. It may in this way impose a vision, which is not easily corrected. A critical self-appraisal of motives and attitude to life by the adviser would often be needed in order to better recognise and take into account the immaterial motivation of the people involved in development projects. "There is a paradox. Sustainable development is to be sought first not in the farming family, or the community, but in us, the trained professionals. Our power, beliefs, reductionism and short time horizons are much of the problem, while farmers' knowledge, systems thinking, long-term investments and enhanced competence and participation are much of the solution. It is not a case of either professional's knowledge and competence, or farmers' knowledge and competence. The need is for a balanced mix, which means a shift towards the farmers' side to enhance farmers' analysis and innovation." Chambers (1993, p. 101).

It appears that an essential element in to arrive at this approach of the adviser to the farmer is a mutual trust that has to be established (Bergsma 1996). It may make advocated participation in projects and planning genuine and durable.

Conclusions.

Genuine participation means the inclusion of the ideas and concerns of the land user right from the inception of development plans onwards. It is probably the best approach to land husbandry and soil and water conservation because it gives the opportunity to:

- avoid imposing the limitations of the adviser's view,
- recognise immaterial incentives in the farmers' management
- create mutual trust between land users and advisers

These are all key factors for effective efforts towards land husbandry. They can be better realised when the expert himself also looks at his own motives for action. He may feel a need for adjustment of them to his highest ideals. After all, the land users may have to adjust to new land use plans. And it becomes clear from set-backs elsewhere (Bergsma 2000), that the recognition and inclusion of immaterial motivation is needed to obtain the sustained commitment, the wholehearted support, to policies and plans by the people concerned.

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