

Participatory Approaches: The Role of Education, Culture, and NGOs

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Chaired:

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Introduction

One of the key lessons in development from all parts of the world, including Central Asia, is the crucial importance of people's participation in all aspects of development. If governments are very serious about moving towards sustainable development, measures to promote participation in all aspects of the economy and the environment are a necessary precondition.

For countries with a long history of centralized government, change takes time; people need to learn to work together and make their own decisions rather than being told what to do.

There are many good examples of successful development initiatives in which people's participation and management have played key roles. One of the most encouraging experiences comes from war-torn Afghanistan where, even amidst all the fighting, people are working together to sustain their economic and social activities.

Historically, most communities had their own internal mechanisms for decision-making for many aspects of the economy, environment, and social life. Big governments have changed much of this in the past, but there is a new movement to promote local action and initiative to ensure that societies move towards sustainable development. Obviously the local people must get an opportunity, but they cannot do it alone without strong support from the government and also from the international community.

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Major Issues and Experiences

PUBLIC INTEREST IN DEVELOPMENTAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES

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Development experience is largely based on the classic Third World studies (Africa, South Asia); tropical ecosystems; post-colonial structures; and poorly-educated, village-based populations. There are significant differences between development experiences in the arid Central Asian plains and mountains and its post-Soviet structures and Communist organization. However there are certain common aspects that should also be applied to Central Asia if initiatives for sustainable development are to be successful. These are examples of successful local initiatives and activities - such as the WFP project for erosion control at Mizhi in Shaanxi province 1989; the Water Users' Association Tacis project in Jallalabad, Fergana, Kyrgyzstan, 1995; the experience of the USAID-Israeli irrigation scheme at Kolkhoz Ahmed Yasavi, Cherchik rayon Tashkent, Uzbekistan 1996; and the problems highlighted by Tacis Water Resources' Management and Agricultural Production in the Central Asian Republics (WARMAP) Project Uzbekistan 1996.

Development initiatives will only work if people are convinced of their relevance and importance to their own well-being, and if the land ownership and local government structures allow people to feel responsible for their own actions. The Aral Sea disaster is a good example of the top-down approach totally wrecking natural resources.

In this context, TEAP's attempts to raise public awareness and involvement in environmental decision-making is at the

heart of sustainable development. The recent Kazakh decision at the European Environment Ministers' conference in Aarhus to sign the Convention on Access to Environmental Information should be welcomed. The TEAP has made efforts to engage in sponsored programme makers, environmental 'advertising', parliamentary liaison, NGO training, and training of environmental journalism students; (*a twenty-minute video diary of the project is available on VHS*).

THE COMMUNITY FORUM AN EXAMPLE OF SUSTAINABLE CIVIC INNOVATION IN AFGHANISTAN

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Afghanistan has been at war for the last twenty years and is currently experiencing another major upheaval. The Taliban are on the offensive, capturing most of the country. They look set to take total control. In July this year, all the NGOs left Kabul, the capital, and only 'life saving' UN programmes continued, as it became increasingly difficult to work under the Taliban edicts following their failure to honour an agreed Memorandum of Understanding on Humanitarian Assistance. Then, in August, all international UN staff were evacuated following the US air strikes against suspected terrorist training camps. Now the Iranians are conducting military manoeuvres on their border and all surrounding countries are watching nervously or taking interventionist action. In addition to these problems, Afghanistan faces the same problems (identified by this conference) as its Central Asian neighbours. In addition, it has one of the largest refugee populations in the world, has one of the lowest levels on the Human Development Index, and has a massive brain drain and flight of capital.

Against this backdrop, the UN has, over the years, been assisting in the country's

rehabilitation and, through its political wing, been trying to broker a peace settlement. Currently, the UNDP has a two-year programme to rebuild communities under its PEACE initiative (Poverty Eradication and Community Empowerment). UNCHS Habitat is implementing the urban component of this, based on a strategy developed in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif during an earlier phase of the programme which aimed to rehabilitate the urban areas (1995-1997). It is working in the main cities of Afghanistan as well as in the mountainous area of Hazarajat in central Afghanistan, a rural area famous for its Buddhist heritage with 150ft statues of Buddha carved into its cliff faces.

The Community Forum and the concerned development organizations enable communities to rebuild local systems of governance, develop local administrative and management systems, contribute to socioeconomic recovery, and improve their local environment. Communities are able to govern their own affairs and make informed strategic choices about how to invest the resources that they have based on sound economic analyses which include environmental and social considerations. They are able to generate, through the community enterprises, not only employment and hence livelihoods, but opportunities for vocational training and the production of locally needed goods and services at affordable prices using local materials. It is also able to achieve economies of scale through cooperative purchasing schemes that contribute to the area's economic recovery from its primarily agricultural base. At the same time, the educational courses are an opportunity for the community not only to improve the quality of and accessibility to education in the area, but also to introduce concepts and ideas relevant to their immediate environment and to inculcate civic principles related to rights and responsibilities.

Significantly, the programme has thrived in both the urban and rural areas and has been unable to keep up with the community demand for more. They have largely survived the vicissitudes of war, although, no matter how sustainable they are as systems, like a tree they can also be felled by the axe of war and political policies that run counter to principles of civic engagement.

KARATEGHIN-ALTAI AS THE TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR: A KEY TO INTEGRATION OF REMOTE MOUNTAIN AREAS INTO THE CENTRAL ASIA ENVIRONMENT?

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The eastern provinces of Karateghin, Darvaz, and Vahio are peripheral, underdeveloped mountain areas of Tadzhikistan. The factors that created this situation are given below.

- ▶ Remoteness of these mountain territories from the main political centres (Dushanbe, Houjant, Kurgan-Tiube) and the resulting efforts of local leaders to gain greater autonomy
- ▶ Traditional conservatism of the local population in relation to political and economic innovations, which is a general feature of mountain communities
- ▶ Discriminatory social and migration policies of the central Government: these regions were the most heavily hurt by the large-scale migrations to cotton plantations in the Vaksh Valley
- ▶ The investment policy pursued by the central Government was not of benefit to the economic development of these regions

These territories included the easternmost Jirghital region where the ethnic majority were Kyrgyz nomads.

After the changes in the former USSR, the support to these regions from the state budget diminished even more dramatically. During the current economic and political crisis in Tadjikistan, the situation of the Karateghin regions became even worse. These regions are completely isolated from the central areas of Tadjikistan and suffer from intricate conflicts for power between local leaders. As a result, the local population suffers from poverty and malnutrition.

Nevertheless, in view of its geographical situation, Karateghin may have an outstanding role in the economic revival and development of Tadjikistan, as well as in the broader region. This may be realised through the formation of the transportation and economic corridor along the Valleys of Surhob and Kyzyl-Sun (Altai Valley, Kyrgyzstan) which opens to Sary-Tash. SaryTash can be seen as the major node of the Trans Asian transportation network: it completes the Pamir Tract and opens the route to Kashgar (Kashi) in China, thus forming an integrated route with the Karakoram Highway.

This transportation corridor may provide the following advantages.

- ▶ Operation in all seasons: the route, which follows one river valley system of Vaksh-Surhob-Kyzyl-Suu, has no high passes or inaccessible sections. Three passes in China (Simhana-Ulugchat-Kashgar Highway) are open 11 months a year.
- ▶ Existence of a road network (only a few sections of the 750-km long route are missing currently). The whole section from Dushanbe to Kashgar has an asphalt or pebble-stone cover.
- ▶ The distance from Dushanbe to Kashgar is only 750-800km (540km from Garm, 465km from Jirghital).

Implementation of this Project may prove beneficial in several ways.

- ▶ It will support integration of the marginal, peripheral, and poorly developed regions into the general development context of Central Asia. This integration requires the political will of Tadjikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and China based on inter-governmental agreements
- ▶ This transportation zone can be a catalyst for economic and social development of the adjacent regions within the watershed of Vaksh-Surhob-Kyzyuu.
- ▶ The zone of the proposed transportation corridor is inhabited by numerous nations and ethnic groups: Tajiks, Kyrgyz, Kazahs, Uigur, etc, which constitute an outstanding cultural community requiring preservation and protection.
- ▶ Although this region has long since been inhabited by human populations, the industrial impacts are minimal because isolation and marginality; and thus the little modification to the cultural landscapes (developed by Kyrgyz nomads and Tajiks - irrigated land cultivators); have been experienced. The magnificent beauty of the mountain ranges and depressions suggest possibilities for development of protected territories, national parks, and tourism.

NATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING IN KYRGHYZSTAN

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The National Capacity Development Programme was started in 1997. It has adopted the concepts and principles of sustainable development, and these include integration of society, overcoming internal and external isolation as a land-

locked and mountainous country, overcoming natural disasters, human and social development, and democratic management of the economy and the society. It also emphasises the sustainable use of local resources and seeks to consolidate the national interest in developing stability and support for national strategy. It outlines a strategy for the climatic environment and the need to integrate it with science. It calls for special action plans for implementation that should include the legal basis as well as the mechanisms for cooperation at all levels of society.

The natural resources in the country were influenced by its special geographical situation. If, on the one hand, it provided opportunities for development, there were also many limiting factors. It was a landlocked country and consequently the need to open the Silk Route was emphasised. The country had an abundance of fresh water resources formed by glaciers. There were 30,000 rivers which were 100,000km in length. The country had 1,000 lakes and much of the water was used by the country and its neighbours for irrigation. There were over 30,000km of irrigation canals that were causing major natural disasters in the country. The country also had some minerals, but its most valuable resources were the bioresources that needed to be managed on a sustainable basis.

The state is strongly committed to the sustainable use of natural resources. Its philosophy is that human and environmental development should go together. There is a possibility that economic difficulties could threaten sustainable use of natural resources and the factors behind such instabilities should be better understood and addressed. The most important issue is the need for close co-operation between the people and the state. It is always easier to prevent disaster than to try to struggle with its impacts.

EFFECT OF POPULATION RESETTLEMENT ON SUSTAINABLE LAND USE

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The Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (Ningxia in short) is a typical desert area in northwestern China. From 1983 to 1995, a programme for population resettlement was conducted. More than 150,000 poverty-stricken farmers were relocated from the overpopulated villages in the water eroded hilly areas in southern Ningxia to the newly-reclaimed irrigated areas in mid- and northern Ningxia. The previously desert steppe with a small population density was developed into a promising oasis. The methods, benefits, and experiences of the population resettlement are of general interest.

Located in the upper reaches of the Yellow River, the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (Ningxia in short) is one of the typical desert areas in northwestern China. Around 3.77 million hectares (or 72.8 per cent of the total territory of Ningxia) suffer from land deterioration.

With the construction of irrigation systems, this area has developed into a promising oasis for agricultural activities. Infrastructural construction to establish roads, electricity supplies, communications, etc, were also undertaken.

The farmers were organized to resettle in the newly-reclaimed areas. House construction, land preparation, tree planting, and cropping were subsidised by local financing through small preferential loans. The resettlers were mainly poverty-stricken farmers and resettlement was voluntary. The newly-reclaimed land was distributed on the basis of the number of people in a household, a contract for long-term use, and the right to inheritance.

The net income per capita in the Gu-Hai Area increased from *yuan* 30.5 before irrigation in 1980 to *yuan* 1,689 under irrigation in 1995. Around 80,000 poverty-stricken people were removed from the hilly areas in southern Ningxia to the irrigated areas. Through plentiful inputs of labour and water, the previous deteriorating steppe, deserted land, and low-yielding rainfed farmland were turned into a promising oasis. Before the reclamation, the soils were mainly sand-blown with very low contents of organic matter and nutrients. Through cultivation, fertilizer application, and irrigation with silted water from the Yellow River for several years, the physical and chemical features of the soils were improved and soil fertility was enhanced.

The increase in vegetation coverage reduced the impact of winds and sandstorms.

In the newly-reclaimed, pump-irrigated areas, the layer of soil was relatively thick, the underground water was buried around 20m deep, the salt content in most of the areas was low, and the pumped water was of high quality.

The migration of poverty-stricken farmers from the overpopulated villages in the water-eroded hilly areas to the newly-claimed pump-irrigated areas alleviated the pressure of over population on the land resources and environment of the areas of origin.

Some of the issues that require attention are water-use efficiency, guidance of monocropping systems, and development of forests. The application of barnyard manure should be encouraged. Secondary soil salinity should be prevented through rational irrigation. Rural energy supplies should be carefully managed. Rats should be controlled. Rural industrial parks should be planned and industries that might be a

source of pollution should be prohibited. The overgrowth in population should be controlled.

**ENVIRONMENTAL LAW IN RUSSIA AND
KYRGHYZSTAN**
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Environmental laws in the Central Asian countries go back to the period of the former Soviet Union in the early 1920s. On paper everything was regulated and private ownership was abolished. It was replaced by the right to use different natural resources, and various regimes for using these natural resources were implemented. In 1921 the Protection of Nature Heritage was introduced as the first environmental law.

There were two main branches in the environmental system that were being developed. The first one dealt with the management of the natural environment and resources based on scientific principles and the second one dealt with elaborate resource-oriented administrative guidelines for different organizations responsible for dealing with various natural resources.

In practice there were many problems and many new laws were introduced during the 1960s and 1970s. Environmental protection was also incorporated in the constitution and a new Ministry of Environment was also established in 1986.

The new countries of Central Asia have inherited this system and have made various changes over the years. Changes in the Environmental Acts include the rights of citizens to a healthy environment, the polluter pays principle, commitment to sustainable development, access to information, and the concept of environmental liability. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan environmental charges for pollution are being used to finance environmental protec-

tion agencies.

The main difficulties are the lack of integration between the organizations involved and no role for the private sector in the past because of the absence of private ownership of resources. Because of the role of different actors, apart from the State organizations, continuing dialogue, procedural laws, and appropriate organizational changes are needed to accommodate multi-party interaction and decision-making. Another issue is that some of the highly scientific systems in place could prove to be very difficult for the private sector implement. There are many specific laws that are not as yet in place, and there many confusions and gaps in the present coverage by environmental laws. All of these are complex and difficult and should be resolved by involvement of the different actors concerned.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN PAKISTAN
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As we discuss and seek to draft strategies on sustainable development, it is important to realise and appreciate that local communities, such as those in Baltistan in Northern Pakistan, had self-sustaining practices for hundreds and probably even thousands of years. It is only with the introduction of industrialisation and exploitation from the West and the East that these are being questioned. It is necessary to recognise these self-sustainable models and learn from the experiences of these people. This area in northern Pakistan can be seen as a 'wasteland of war' — a war that has gone on between India and Pakistan for over 10 years. The degradation of the natural environment has been enormous and communities are cut off from the rest of the country for long periods. This area is the home of the Karakoram range with the largest group

of highest peaks in the world. It is also the head of the Indus River. The damage to both the ecosystem and wildlife, particularly the ibex sheep, has become a matter of serious concern. The army has been very responsive and helpful about restoring the environment.

The problems of the area are complex. It has been neglected within the country because of difference in religious sects. It has also been adversely affected by the anti-Islamic posture of the West. There is need for more education about Islam in the West in order to overcome biases against Islam.

Regarding future development of the area, emphasis has been on the micro-level, working small-scale with locally initiated projects. These are found to be both self sustaining and successful. There were initial difficulties, but they were overcome by working closely with local religious leaders, pointing to the role of religion in promoting self-sustaining models. Emphasis should be on the local communities deciding their own agenda in order to start the building blocks of development. Once this is in place, it can be facilitated by NGOs. Economic considerations are also important and attention should be given to rooting activities to local resources.

The communities in the northern areas have been underserved for a long time, and it is essential that assistance be provided to serve these people. There is also a need for a continuing evaluation process so that we can learn from our experiences.

Conclusions

Experiences throughout Central Asia, including China and other areas, strongly support the idea that projects become more sustainable with the full participation of the local people. Once people are motivated to participate, they will come up with solutions that are more

in line with their needs. Many good projects have failed because they did not consider it necessary to involve local people.

Description of the experiences in raising public awareness about environmental problems and sustainable develop-

Points To Be Considered in the Context of Participatory Approaches

- ▶ Role of empowerment and the use of education as an entry point
- ▶ The decentralization of authority
- ▶ Sustaining organizations established at times of crises
- ▶ Mechanisms used for consultation with people and identifying local decision-makers
- ▶ Need for peace to sustain local development
- ▶ Importance of changing attitudes along with changes in laws in the context of environmental law
- ▶ Nature of environmental changes
- ▶ Methods to improve incomes of people in remote areas

ment in parts of Central Asia would help replicate such successful initiatives elsewhere.

Many projects and activities were imposed upon communities during the former Soviet Regime without any attention being given to the needs of the communities or their environmental impacts.

There are many differences between countries of the former Soviet Union and the classical third world, and it is important to consider these when applying development models and approaches.

Rebuilding a community that is in a state of collapse following a war is difficult.

One has to devise specific mechanisms in order to be successful. It is important to get women to organize and participate in different programmes. Economic aspects should be integrated with management and social components and people should be allowed to determine their priorities. External agencies should attempt to facilitate without creating dependency.

The transport corridor through Central Asia, which more or less overlapped with the silk route, should be developed. Mountain areas in the past were used only for extraction of resources, and this policy should change and focus on the development of mountain people. Efforts were underway to create a Mountain University in Central Asia, but there are many aspects that have to be finalised. It was also mentioned that stronger linkages could be established with the Mountain Forum.

In Kyrgyzstan there have been recent changes in the development strategy owing to the major problems being experienced in different areas – particularly the management and use of natural resources. There are also new experiences in working with the local people. Poverty and lack of funds had a negative effect on the environment.

Families from a poverty-stricken area of the Ningxia Plains were resettled in another area in Go Hai. In the new area people were provided with better facilities and services, and farming was promoted using improved practices and ecological considerations. After a decade the programme has been considered successful because of its favourable impact on the economy, ecology, and social aspects.

In Kyrgyzstan environmental laws had their beginnings in the 1920s and were focussed on the use of natural resources by public sector organizations. As private ownership was abolished, laws to

govern the private sector — including litigation, appeal, and penalties — have been the most difficult areas to develop. Continuing dialogue is important. It was also important to note that a highly vigorous scientific system might be neither

practical nor feasible. In Northern Pakistan, promoting community development with very little outside support, focussing on small-scale activities, developing community groups, and supporting community-based initiatives has proven successful.

