

Post-Conflict Peace Building through Natural Resource Management in the High Pamir and Pamir-Alai Mountain Region

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Problem:

During the Soviet era, settlement and population growth was actively promoted within the High Pamir and Pamir-Alai mountains mainly for border security reasons. To sustain the increased population (roughly quadrupled since 1925), the region was heavily subsidized from Moscow with all the goods and services required by the inhabitants provided at minimal prices. Such subsidies supported the development of an entire economic and natural resource management system that was unrelated to the very limited natural carrying capacity of the region's ecosystem resources. Central planning resulted in traditional land use systems being replaced by collective farms, often assigned solely to livestock breeding serving distant markets in the Soviet empire. At the same time large numbers of pastoralists of Kyrgyz ethnic descent, living in the High Pamirs, were forced to abandon their traditional transhumance herding life style and made to take up permanent residence in newly constructed small towns located at altitudes of 3,400 to 3,600 meters.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's, all subsidies ceased virtually from one day to another, leaving behind an isolated region with a lopsided economy deprived of its markets and exchange relations. Unemployment increased dramatically with the closure of inefficient state industries and government retrenchment. The effect was to leave some 80% of the population either unemployed or underemployed, with little or no income earning opportunities. Poverty increased as former paid employment opportunities ceased and subsidized food and fuel disappeared. Seven years of civil war followed which led to further deterioration of human and natural resources. The severe degradation of the natural resources is exacerbated by effects of changes in climate characteristics. This area is now designated a global biodiversity hotspot and requires specialized approaches to its management.

Case study:

This paper will outline the approach adopted under the GEF/UNEP/UNU Sustainable Land Management Project (PALM) to address the gaps and constraints within the enabling legal, policy, and institutional environment at the regional, national and local government levels, through the development of an integrated trans-boundary strategic planning and regulatory framework.

It will outline the process used to review existing national laws and regulations against the requirements for sustainable land management and ecosystem protection within the High Pamir and Pamir-Alai Mountains. Various gaps, conflicts and overlaps in existing legislation have been identified. It will describe the process adopted to improve the enabling legal and regulatory framework at the trans-boundary, national and local levels. In particular, the paper will outline the participative regional natural resource management governance framework, including the national laws and institutions to implement a new trans-boundary law for

sustainable management of the high altitude mountain region, and its transferability to other similar regions of the world.