

Case study for ACT toolkit on best practice

Climate Change effort in Tajikistan: what worked well

Central Asia is a region severely affected by hydrological, geophysical and drought-related disaster and livelihood risks. While fast onset disasters such as earthquakes tend to dominate the attention, over the past 5 years, risks and vulnerability associated with climate change have become increasingly important at community level. These risks are both fast and slow onset and therefore require a broadened definition of risk reduction measures incorporating climate change adaptation to safe life and livelihoods¹.

Risks identified by communities in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan include earthquake, floods and mudflows, accelerating retreat of glaciers and loss of water resources, increasing summer temperatures and drought episodes, erratic weather patterns resulting in rapid climate shifts, increasingly intensive rainfall, stronger winds and extreme winter (very low temperatures and avalanche risks). Declining water resources directly impacts on the availability of hydropower, which in turn affects economic activity and can result in loss of local employment, migration and poverty.

Communities find it difficult to predict these changes or access easily understood information on likely future climate change. The impacts on their lives and livelihoods are increasingly severe and are exacerbated by the rough physical terrain, decaying rural infrastructure, limited community understanding of their legal rights and limited government capacity and support services. Taking a broader livelihood risk reduction approach implies addressing both the insidious gradual degradation of livelihoods² that in turn makes communities more vulnerable to the higher profile disasters such as earthquakes³.

Weak potential of civic organizations as well as low number of organizations dealing with the poor and having a climatic aspect in their programs just like insufficient cooperation between NGOs and governmental organizations in elaboration of national documents on climate change appears to be one of the reasons why development programs in Tajikistan do not include protection of livelihoods sources from climatic threats

Neither National Action Plan nor other documents on climate policy developed by the government of Tajikistan in recent years designed to counteract neither climatic change pay attention to the importance of adaptation of communities and reduction of their vulnerability. There is certainly very limited connection between what happens on policy level and 'on the grounds' activities performed by many local organizations that are not sufficiently equipped with knowledge and skills to help communities to cope with climate change.

For this reason activities of Youth Ecological Centre (YEC) derive from two current projects, one focused on helping the communities to adapt⁴ and the other helping civil society organizations (CSOs) to come together⁵ and tackle major concerns that poorest and most vulnerable individuals face. It has to be mentioned though that both of the ideas to implement those projects is the next step after conducting research in 2007 on Public Perceptions of Climate Change in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The research

¹ Risk Reduction and Adaptation Strategy for ACT members in Central Asia, 2009-2011, pre-final version

² An assessment conducted by OXFAM GB shows that 10% of animals are dying each year in the region

³ According to Geohazard international, there is a 40 % chance that one of the big towns in the region is hit by a strong earthquake with at least 50.000 people dead. (Source: Swiss Disaster Reduction Strategy for Central Asia- 2004-2008)

⁴ Risk reduction and Climate Change in Tajikistan project, currently being implemented

⁵ Climate Change: Developing country's vision, currently being implemented

included questionnaires and round tables at community level. A series of other researches on the country's legislative base and Tajikistan's status on international conventions have also been conducted. These surveys allowed collect data for the last 5 years on climate changes, their impact on the quality of life – health, ecosystem, agriculture, incomes and employment.

Based on the collected data, in 2008 Youth Eco Center launched a new project on adaptation of communities together with a new project aimed at advocating for the interests of public organizations. The project included vulnerability analysis in 5 communities. Furthermore, 3 Public Centers on adaptation to climate change have been created in Shaartuz, Nosyrhusrav and Hissar regions of Tajikistan. Local action plans on adaptation have been developed. These plans allowed making warmer more than 130 houses, to build 9 greenhouses and provide most poor families with battery lighters and energy-efficient stoves. Each center created insurance seed fund to provide assistance to farmers in case of disasters and loss of crops. Special public management system will be created to manage the fund; communities are being trained to on how to protect plants and use of more draught-resistant crops, more efficient use of irrigation water.

A mobile exhibition of available energy-saving materials and alternative energy (solar stoves, kitchens, solar panels, collectors, water heaters, solar dryers) is being currently created. Furthermore, 4 demonstration sections on alternative energy (solar panels) on the basis of Community Centers and Youth Eco Center are planned to be created in autumn 2009.

A network of NGOs on climate change and alternative energy (Tajik Climate Change Network TajCN) has been created to develop potential and awareness of civil society on climate change, elaboration of a common position on adaptation of population to climate change, development of mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol in Tajikistan, international talks on climate change. The network deals with all climate related issues. Furthermore, a debate club of NGOs on climate change and ecologic policy was created in Dushanbe. The club consists of 15 public organizations. A special delivery system was launched in the frames of the club which lets NGOs and international organizations discuss all aspects of climate related problems starting from community level up to lobbying and advocacy campaigns at international levels. A national conference on climate policy called the "Problem of climate change and public participation" was conducted in February 2009 where representatives of communities, public and international organizations, government officials responsible for making decisions on climate change have attended the conference. In the course of the discussion conference participants have elaborated a common vision on climate change, power engineering, adaptation strategy and public participation. The closing statement of public organizations was submitted to the government of Tajikistan for taking public opinion into account during elaboration of National Action Plans on climate change and during preparation for the UN international negotiations on climate change due in Copenhagen in 2009.

At this stage it is difficult to come up with the statements about the sustainability of the project as both projects are still ongoing and pilot initiatives in some ways. However, definite changes in people's minds at community level can be clearly seen today. In addition, YEC has managed to create a momentum for its advocacy work in the country and generate interest among other CSO and government on the topic of climate change. Moreover, they managed to bring these two elements together and we believe that this is a very unique example that can be replicated (with sensitivity to socio-political and economic contexts) elsewhere in the world and especially in other parts of Central Asia region.