

# MOUNTAIN VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT

## PROMOTING SELF-ORGANIZATION OF COMMUNITIES

### Struggling against windmills

In Central Asia, the structural adjustment of the agricultural sector and its integration into the market economy has caused unemployment in villages and has ultimately led to out-migration and the collapse of the village livelihood systems created under the Soviet Union.

For the majority of rural people, the income generated by current agricultural production barely covers the basic essentials to survive. The frequent passive attitude of villagers, waiting for outside help without making major efforts to improve the situation themselves, is not helping to solve the problem. Moreover village inhabitants often behave very individualistically and refuse to collaborate with other households in order to solve common problems.

While state structures try to address the most pressing social and economic problems and needs of villagers their support seldom reaches its target mainly due to a lack of real commitment by the involved administrative bodies. Although consider-

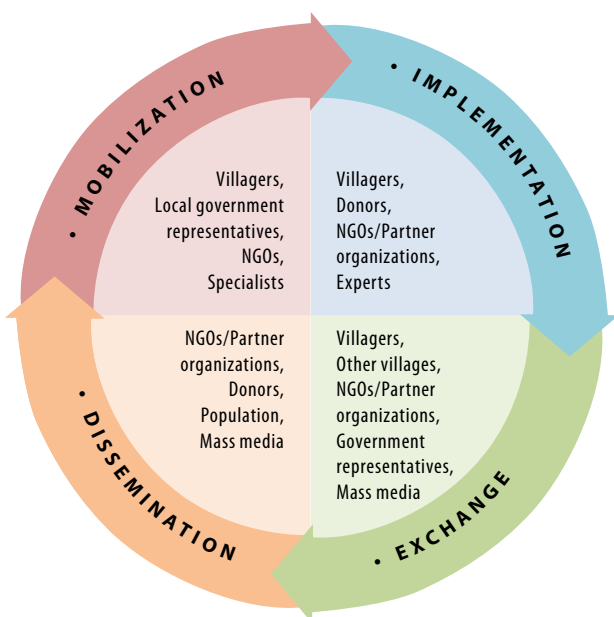
able resources are invested, the effect remains modest. Moreover, the approaches and mechanisms proposed lack a comprehensive understanding of the problem. This explains why government investment in the development of social infrastructure in villages, frequently aimed at combating out-migration, remains mostly ineffective.

### Promoting self initiative

The approach promoted by the CAMP agencies supports bottom-up initiatives meant to solve problems of mountain communities. The goal is to foster self-organization of villagers eager to solve their problems at village level and lobby their interests at national and international levels. The role of CAMP agencies is to act as an intermediary, linking state organizations and donors with local communities.

### Step 1: Mobilizing communities

The first activity of CAMP is to raise awareness and mobilize community members through 'Learning for Sustainability' (L4S) workshops (see Activity Sheet 2). There, participants exchange information and experiences. Sometimes a so-called 'Initiative Group' is created which promotes joint decision-making and can help in participatory village development planning. This increases the ownership and legitimacy for future implementation contrary to the common top-down planning and implementation where villagers usually don't feel responsible. By becoming more actively involved in planning villagers also feel more responsible for implementing the planned activities. The collaborative outcomes of the L4S workshops can thus be used as a starting point for other organizations, projects or programs as well as by governmental structures.



CAMP's 4 step approach in facilitating village development



## Step 2: Implementing concrete activities

Based on the compiled overview of potential interventions identified during Step 1, one or several ideas are selected and pilot projects developed. Their implementation is financed through small grants such as the GTZ-CCD 'Small Grants Program'. These projects are meant to test the intended mobilization of communities. Different villagers, donors, experts and administrative structures can be involved in their implementation (see Activity Sheet 8).

## Step 3: Exchanging experiences and networking

In order to improve the development process the exchange of experiences made in steps 1 and 2 is shared among different village communities e.g. by participating in conferences, meetings, round tables, panel discussions or village exchange visits (see Activity Sheet 15). This has proven to be of great interest to the villagers and to have a strong 'power of persuasion'.

## Step 4: Disseminating ideas

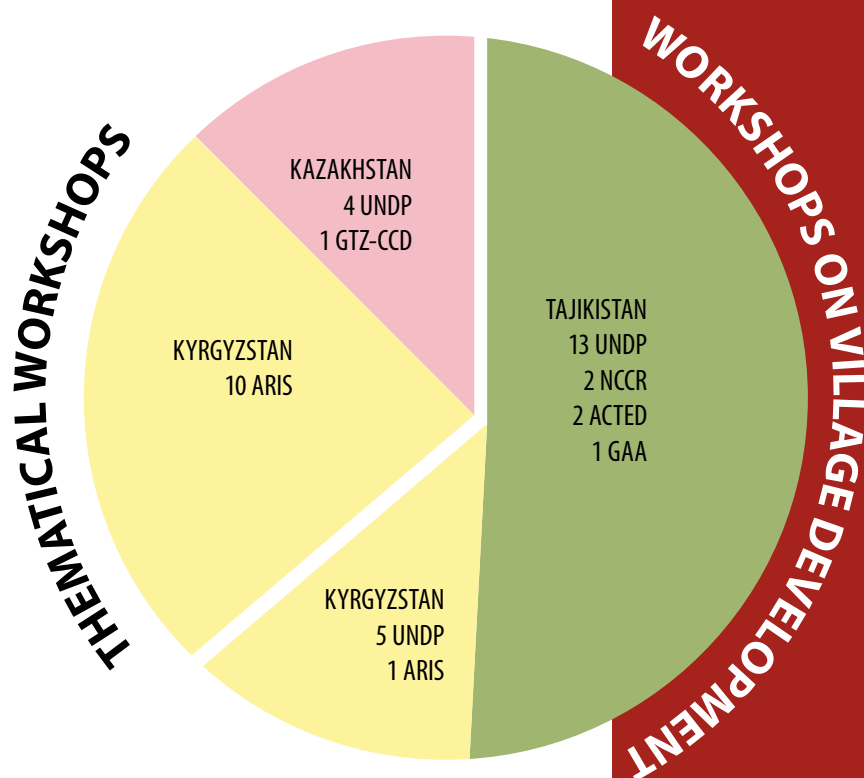
The further dissemination of effective ideas is facilitated through other partner organizations, local initiative groups, government structures, and the mass media as well as newsletters and magazines produced by the CAMP Network. By planning for this 4th step in projects an up-scaling of the outcomes can be achieved and thus the overall impact of the efforts improved.

## Responding to real needs

This village development facilitating approach of CAMP has raised considerable interest. So far CAMP agencies have carried out over 130 L4S workshops in Kyrgyzstan, 82 in Tajikistan, and 21 in Kazakhstan (see Activity Sheet 2). Other donor organizations and governmental entities are showing interest in this approach by commissioning workshops.

## Obstacles to overcome

When initiating the CAMP village development approach one of the major problems is the poor relationship between governmental institutions and the local population. Both the visible lack of effective state support and the centralized decision-making processes are among the major root causes for a persistent distrust of local people vis-à-vis any external governmental intervention. This represents a major challenge for all NGOs trying to act as intermediaries between these two frequently opposed stakeholder groups. Moreover many of the proposed solutions appear out of reach. Frequently the legal framework is inappropriate. Villagers also often lack information regarding various credit instruments and are therefore unable or scared to use such possibilities.



*L4S workshops carried out by other organizations or commissioned by them to CAMP (data for 2004-2007)*

## Elements of success

While implementing the presented approach, it has become clear that the following elements are vital if success is to be achieved:

- Securing a multi-level and multi-stakeholder participation
- Allowing for interactive spontaneous discussions
- Tolerting both positive and negative statements
- Applying the L4S methodology to foster interactions among stakeholders

### **Example from Kazakhstan**

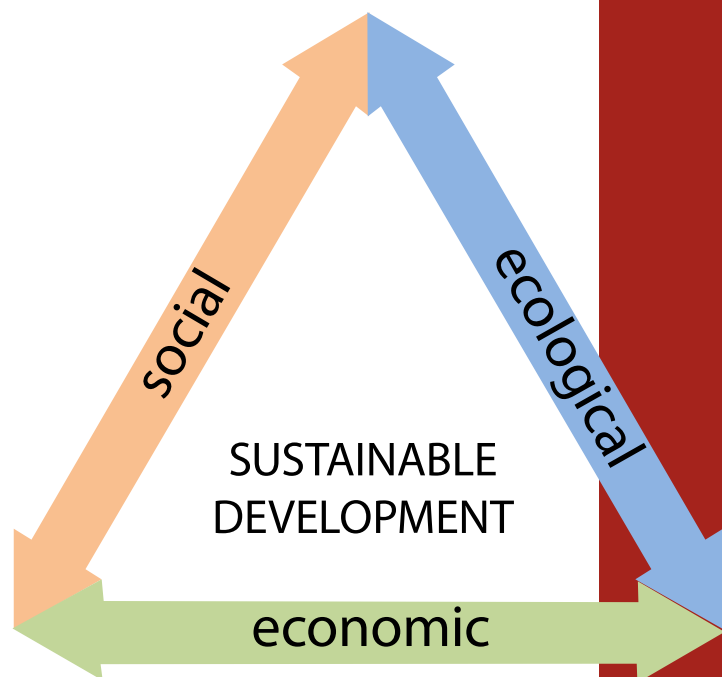
*A round table sponsored by the DARA Foundation on 'defining administrative, economic and legal barriers for implementing governmental programs on land protection and degradation' was carried out using the L4S approach (Taldykorgan, center of Almaty oblast, November 2006).*

*The multi-level multi-stakeholders encounters brought together representatives of different governmental institutions such as akims of village councils, various state departments at Almaty oblast level, farmers, and representatives of local communities, national and local NGOs. It became obvious that one of the major difficulties is the lack of common understanding and the lack of a working relationship between the local population and state responsible representatives. The major outcome of this round table was a resolution on the usefulness of the L4S approach for mobilizing village communities, jointly identify problems and ways of solutions, which was proposed to the Ministry of Environment Protection of Kazakhstan.*

## Recommendations

One way to effectively address the mentioned obstacles is to actively involve representatives of local governmental institutions in the foreseen activities from the very beginning. This includes all the above described steps from awareness rising to dissemination. By increasing the ownership of the government and by creating opportunities for encounters with the local population a change in attitude may be achieved characterised by a higher sense of responsibility and increased mutual trust. Regular multi-level and multi-stakeholder dialogues often considerably contribute to such a change of attitude.

Additionally it is necessary to explain to villagers the links between social (e.g. peace, cooperation, safety, partnership, responsibility, respect) economic (e.g. prosperity, profitability, income, efficiency) and ecological aspects (e.g. regeneration, protection, sustainable use of natural resources). They are complementary elements of a comprehensive understanding of sustainable development. This abstract understanding has proven to be most useful when illustrated through concrete village examples.



*The 'Sustainability Triangle'*



### **Example from Tajikistan**

*In 2005 and 2006 a national 'Round Table Discussion' and a 'Public Hearing' regarding water legislation and current water use practices.*

*These efforts led to the elimination of legal gaps and to amendments to the law on 'Water Users Association'. This process was coordinated and carried out with the technical and advisory support of CAMP jointly with partner organizations such as Winrock International, UNEP, and 'Nature Protection Brigade', a local NGO. As a result, a Water Code was developed and submitted to the Parliament. These efforts eventually led to the acceptance of the new Tajik Water Code.*

### **Outlook**

It can be expected that more and more actors will realise the advantages of an integrated village development approach thus probably requesting more L4S workshops and trainings for L4S moderators in order to multiply dissemination efforts.