

# EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCES AND NETWORKING FOR MOUNTAIN PEOPLE

ALLIANCE OF CENTRAL ASIAN MOUNTAIN COMMUNITIES AGOCA

## Bringing mountain people's voices into the arena

The Global Mountain Summit held in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) in autumn 2002, was the final event of the International Year of Mountains (IYM 2002) to promote the 'conservation and sustainable development of mountain regions, thereby ensuring the well-being of mountain and lowland communities'.

In this international event little space was given in the debates to the mountain people themselves. In order to bring this 'local view' into the arena of discussion, CAMP initiated the first Conference of Mountain Communities for Sustainable Development in the capital of Kyrgyzstan before the Summit. Representatives of mountain communities from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan attended to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing their communities.

This is when the idea of creating an 'Alliance of Central Asian Mountain Communities' (AGOCA) - taking into account the Alpine Alliance experience - emerged. Since 2003 representatives of the Alpine Convention Permanent Committee in Germany, Liechtenstein and Switzerland as well as CIPRA International and Alpine Alliance have undertaken concrete actions to support AGOCA development.

## Creation and goal

The AGOCA was created during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference of mountain communities for sustainable development held in 2003 in Dushanbe (Tajikistan) and registered in Kyrgyzstan. Ten communities from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan became founder members. The goal is to assist sustainable development

of Central Asian mountain regions and thereby contribute to improving the living standard of their inhabitants.

## Primary objectives and expectations

The participants of the Conference expressed two expectations:

- to exchange experiences and
- to lobby mountain people's interests at national and regional level

The activities have been carried out with strong support from the CAMP Network.

## Tasks

The two main tasks of AGOCA consist in:

1) Creating new institutions: Mountain communities are stimulated to get organized. As a prerequisite before entering the AGOCA the community has to establish itself as an NGO called 'Territorial Public Council' (TPC). Considerable institutional support was provided by the CAMP Program both at a national and regional level through the AGOCA board of management and General Assembly meetings, respectively. To date AGOCA has united 17 communities in Kyrgyzstan, 11 in Tajikistan and 5 in Kazakhstan.

2) Exchange of experiences: A) Meetings at national and regional levels were organized in the form of exchange visits and annual conferences combined with forums on different themes for mountain regions. B) Distribution of informational materials about best local practices through the AGOCA magazine, information booklets, the 'White Book' (a collection of successful projects), and annual reports. The achievements were:



- organization of five conferences in combination with thematic forums
- organisation of village exchange visits
- publication of eight AGOCA magazine issues in Russian and local languages
- distribution of a 'White book' containing twenty-five projects in Russian
- organization of an exhibition as part of the AGOCA Annual Conference in Kazakhstan in 2004
- distribution of four annual reports (2003-2006)

### VOICES OF MOUNTAIN PEOPLE

*"The majority of mountain villages doesn't get the necessary information on opportunities to develop their villages. The Alliance can help them in exchanging experiences and obtaining information. We should all understand that the stronger and more active TPCs of the villages are, the stronger our Alliance will be."*  
*Ishenbek Musakhodjaev, former President of the AGOCA*

*"Presently there are 20 members in our TPC but in case of need we can organize*

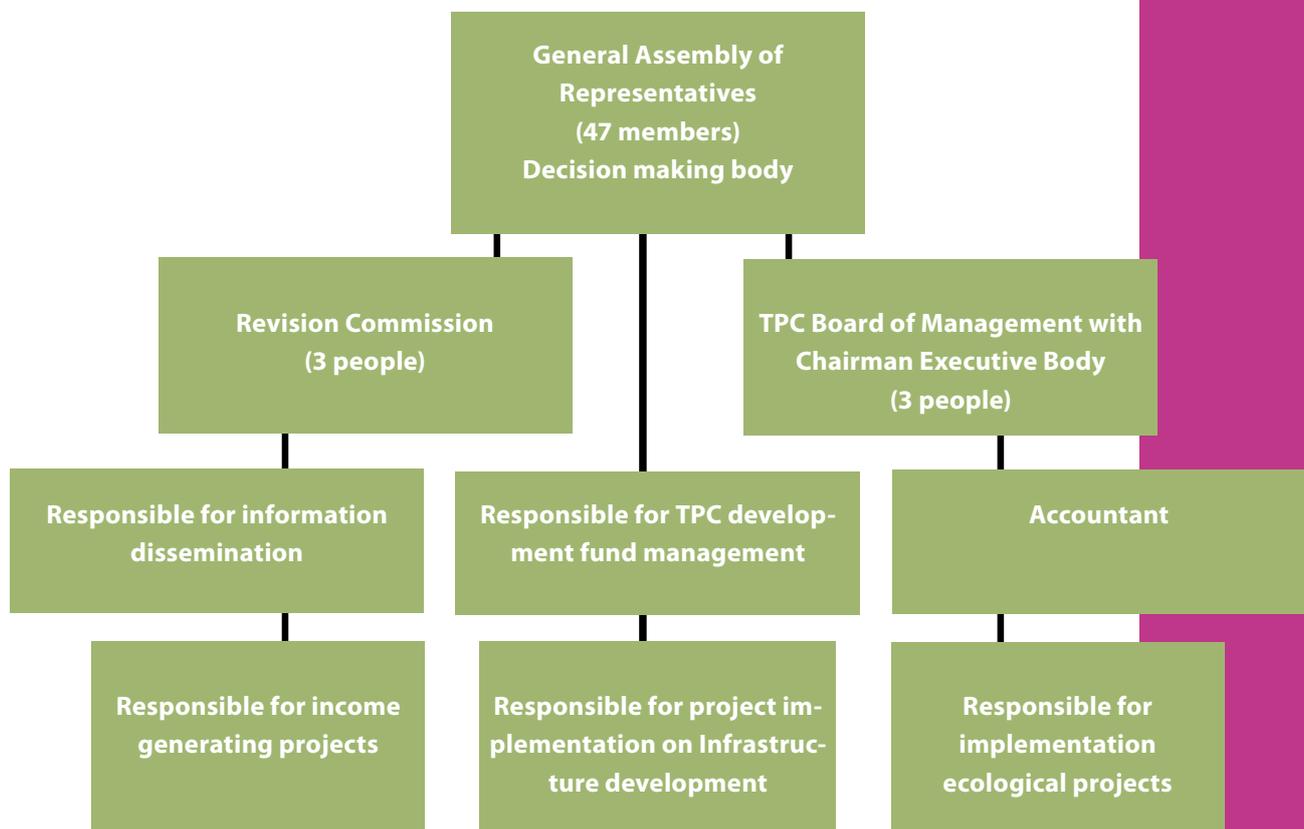
*the majority of adults to repair the school or fix the road. It's important we cooperate with the hukumat [local governance body in our activities], which provides some small financial support and a room in its building for our TPC office free of charge."*  
*Jurakul Hikmatov, chairman TPC of Bobo-surhon village, Tajikistan*

### Positive experiences with TPCs

- work for the profit of the village
- mobilize the village population when problems need solving
- cooperate with the local governance representatives in implementing concrete projects

### Negative experiences with TPCs

- lacks of transparency in organizational and financial management
- lacks of participatory decision-making which then lead to a 'one person TPC' or a 'family TPC'
- lacks support from local governance bodies due to different factors, such as competitiveness for the image among population



Example of a typical TPC organizational structure (Akkiya village, Kyrgyzstan)

The decentralization reform in Central Asia is fully in the process of further elaboration and implementation. Particularly, the decentralization process in Kazakhstan is very 'young' and good examples of involving local authorities and the population in development processes are still weak and seldom occur. In Kazakhstan CAMP Consulting in cooperation with AGOCA villages is taking active steps towards cooperating with state structures. The interest in TPCs is increasing. The state is considering taking them as examples of good practices in the process of local governance development.

## Lessons learnt and recommendations

### From local...

A 'Territorial Public Council' (TPC) is a new structure working at village level. It still needs some approbations and capacity building actions. Although the CAMP agencies conducted a series of thematic workshops in AGOCA villages, TPC institutional strengthening is still ongoing.

- From 2007 pilot workshops in TPC institutional development were conducted by CAMP agencies in AGOCA villages in three countries. The corresponding L4S module will be conducted for all TPCs provided financial resources are available.
- Information flows and links should be strengthened between the different AGOCA villages; this will require new mechanisms and monitoring tools.
- The cooperation of TPCs with local legal and traditional institutions should be strengthened.

### ...to national, regional...

So far most efforts for the AGOCA members have profited the Kyrgyz villages where the regional AGOCA secretariat has been located up to now. In future efforts will be undertaken to address this imbalance and increase the activities both in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

- Additionally at national level possibilities of closer cooperation with other existing networks (such as ARIS in Kyrgyzstan and MSDSP in Tajikistan) should be elaborated to join partnership efforts.



- The AGOCA development fund is currently still modest because the members' capability to provide own funding is very limited. Therefore the Alliance will remain dependent on donor support at least in a mid-term perspective of five to eight years. Fundraising activities will thus be pursued by the entire network to allow activities to take place.

### ...and international

Since the beginning, the AGOCA has been supported by the Alpine partners, particularly the Alpine Alliance created in 1997 by the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA) with the primary goal of exchanging knowledge and experiences in order to implement the Alpine Convention at a municipality level. To seal their relationships, the Alpine and Central Asian networks have founded the Mountain Villages Partnership and Development Foundation (MVPDF), whose purpose is to link people proposing projects and

potential sponsors. Presently alpine communities are transferring financial support for house insulation and efficient stoves construction in AGOCA villages.

## Outlook and future expectations

Presently, the CAMP agencies in Kyrgyzstan (CAMP Alatoo), Tajikistan (CAMP Kuhiston) and Kazakhstan (CAMP Consulting) are continuing to support AGOCA and to implement joint activities. This increasing collaboration between the CAMP agencies and the members of AGOCA will help in establishing a joint network with more responsibilities at the national level. The Alliance is expected to maintain and even increase its role as 'voice of mountain people' by serving the network as:

- a lobbying body defending the interests of mountain people and mountain villages
- a platform for implementing pilot projects and conducting workshops at local, national and regional level
- a source of ideas and a clearing house for demands and local expertise
- an organ for disseminating results and experiences through various instruments in particular through printed materials, village exchange visits and events such as the Annual AGOCA Conference

The second expectation – lobbying mountain people interest – formulated as a long-term vision. It needs to strengthen the relation with the state structures in three countries by the whole CAMP network, where each of the member follows its function and common principle on the eternal way to the sustainable development.



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