

OPEN DIALOGUE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

MULTI-LEVEL ROUND TABLES FOR A COMMON UNDERSTANDING

Development efforts addressing mountain regions need to take into consideration both the natural conditions and the socio-economic peculiarities. In many cases, the problems and needs of these regions are perceived and tackled from an external (top-down), low-land perspective including stereotyping the concerned population. In reality the people living in mountain regions have adapted ways of using the available natural resources and cultural rules. Since they are supposed to manage these resources they should be considered as future custodians and thus be included in the planning, decision-making and implementation processes.

But frequently these marginal areas are neglected due to their remoteness while they often fulfill important environmental services for economic and political centers located in the lowlands. Thus appropriate compensation mechanisms providing mountain communities with finances need to be developed. However, this also requires mountain people to be open to new ideas and ready to test innovations.

There is therefore a need for a multi-level open dialogue involving all concerned stakeholder groups and relevant institutions.

GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of open dialogue is to give all relevant stakeholders a voice in order to express their different points of view in a specific matter. The process should also help to clarify different positions, opinions and interests and to improve mutual understanding. Ultimately, this will help to build reciprocal respect and trust allowing a joint decision to be made based on accepted compromises. The objectives are:

- to create, organise, conduct and facilitate formal and informal round table discussions
- to give mountain communities a voice to express opinions and be heard
- to document the discussions and provide national responsible bodies with concrete inputs for policy and strategy development

A roundtable is a form of public discussion during which ideas are presented and where all participants have equal rights. The idea of a 'round table' as a symbol of equality and nobility goes back to the legend of King Arthur.

CONCEPTUAL ELEMENTS

As a concrete example, the Central Asian Mountain Partnership (CAMP) Program and the UNDP project on 'Institutional strengthening and capacity building for sustainable development' initiated a round table discussion on the sustainable use of natural resources during which experiences were gained on how to best conduct such a process.

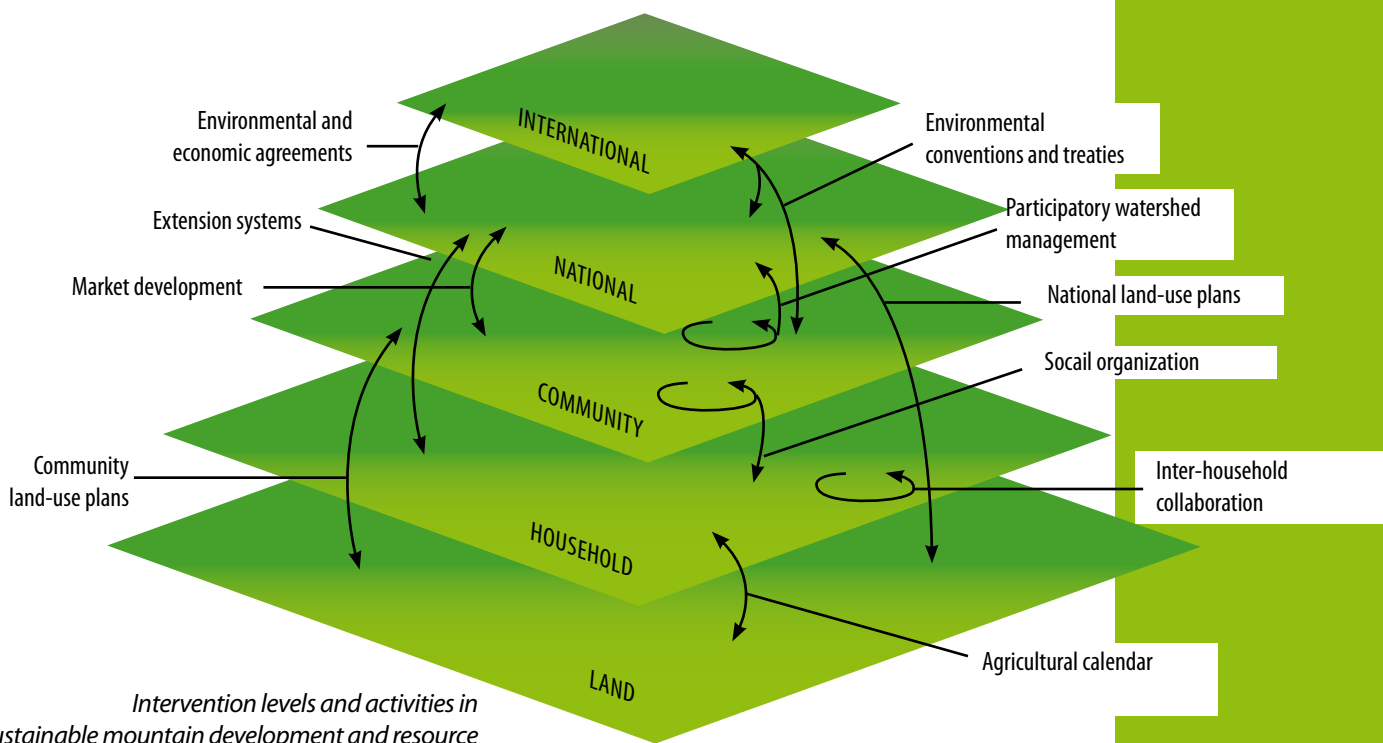
- **TASK FORCE GROUP**

At the beginning a 'task force group' (TFG) was created to help prepare, carry out and



Multi-stakeholder negotiation confronted with different understandings (scientific, traditional, progressive etc.)





Intervention levels and activities in sustainable mountain development and resource management (Hurni et al. 1998, modified)

process the outcomes of the round table(s) held. The multi-level TFG was composed of representatives of different stakeholder groups ranging from farmers to government officials and external actors (such as development agencies) as well as two specialists per topic to strengthen multi-disciplinarity. This understanding is best reflected by a multi-level multi-stakeholder approach. The main responsibility of the TFG was to elaborate the agenda and the questions or topics to be discussed during the round tables. Furthermore, the TFG established a list of invitees, recruited specialists and moderators, documented, and analyzed and processed the collected information. Ideally such a TFG meets 2-4 times before and again 2-3 times after the roundtable discussion.

• **MODERATION**

Professional moderation is needed to further facilitate the roundtable. One of the major tasks of the moderators is to make sure that all participants and represented groups are given equal opportunities to express their opinions and views. This requires special efforts to make sure that everybody can express him/herself in his/her respective native language (e.g. Kyrgyz or Russian). For this experienced translators are needed. Moderators will also be responsible for visualizing and documenting the outcomes of the contributions e.g. on flipcharts or as report.

These demanding tasks need good preparation. Moderators should therefore participate in the TFG work from the very beginning.

• **EXCHANGE OF PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE**

In each round table discussion, a concrete practical experience regarding the possible solution of the problem addressed should be presented to stimulate subsequent group work. In the given example, these inputs were: insulation of houses, soil and water conservation technologies (both by CAMP), collaborative pasture management (by UNDP), collection of herbs and berries (by the NGO 'Ekobionet'), and ecological information and training for local communities (by the NGO 'Biom').

FIVE ROUNDTABLES ON NATURAL RESOURCE-USE WERE HELD IN KYRGYZSTAN 2005-2006

- *Energy efficiency and energy supply (Issyk-Kul Oblast)*
- *Collaborative pasture management (Naryn Oblast)*
- *Water supply for irrigation (Osh Oblast)*
- *Land degradation and poverty (Chuy Oblast)*
- *Access to plant resources of pastures (Chuy Oblast)*

"We should not separate the interests of the State and the farmers because the problems are common and need to be resolved jointly."

Arstanbek Baibosunov,
farmer from Bala-Aiylychi village

"Unfortunately the Government distributed land to the rural population and said: 'do what and how you want' without stressing that there is a legal framework to be respected. Moreover the legal base is often very complicated and contradictory; it needs to be jointly discussed and agreed."

Nurlanbek Jailobaev,
expert on water resource management



Round table discussion about pasture law in Kyrgyzstan (Koitash, June 2007)



Each round table discussion was conducted in places where the problem was most serious. Fifty to sixty participants were invited to each round table with 60% local representation from the concerned Oblast and 40% outsiders. The round table discussions were facilitated by professional moderators.

ANALYSIS AND PUBLICATION OF THE RESULTS

The outcomes of the 5 round tables were submitted to the Ministry of Economy and Finance of the Kyrgyz Republic. They were used by national experts to elaborate the 'Comprehensive Country Development Strategy 2010' (CCDS) and in preparing the 'Assessment of environmental and natural resources for sustainable development'. This direct utilization of the round table outcomes was facilitated by the fact that a representative of the CCDS working group was also member of the round table TFG. In addition the outcomes of the dialogues were compiled as joint publications with the UNDP and made available in Kyrgyz, Russian, and English.

IMPACTS

- Creation of new networks and partnerships: The described collaboration between CAMP and the UNDP has been further expanded by involving the World

Bank through the Agricultural Service Support Project (ASSP), ARIS, GTZ-CCD, and the Pasture Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Processing Industries of the Kyrgyz Republic.

- Input for policy making: Outcomes of the round table discussion were one of the factors that influenced the incorporation of the section about protection and sustainable use of natural resources into the 'Comprehensive Country Development Strategy 2010'.
- Input into legislation processes: Results of round tables can be used to develop new legal documents such as the proposal regarding the formation of pasture committees within the new drafted 'Law on pastures' in Kyrgyzstan.

A roundtable is a very effective instrument for open discussions. One single roundtable can bring more information and ideas than half a year of office work. It is important that we have the possibility to gather different interests, opinions, and ideas and to find ways to reach compromises. I think that the Ministry will use such tools more often for the discussion of important issues.

S. Tynaev,
Deputy Minister of Agriculture,
Water Resources and Processing
Industries of the Kyrgyz Republic

"Results of round table are key elements for the national policy documents drafting...The documents will be intended for official institutions and donor organizations."

Uchkun Tashbaev,
of Economy and Finances of the Kyrgyz Republic



RECOMMENDATIONS

- In order to be more efficient, the discussion within the 'task force group' should be strengthened.
- Open dialogues need sufficient human and financial resources to achieve the expected results and goals as well as to avoid disappointment.
- In order to increase local participation, it is more efficient to hold a series of round table discussions regarding various aspects by inviting different groups of participants.
- Organizations that jointly initiate and organize round tables should agree on common approaches and methods to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts.
- Unequal power relations or bargaining power can hamper effective collaboration. This calls for a clarification of roles and responsibilities.
- In order to obtain good results, sufficient time for preparing the round table is necessary; this is even more important when 'hot' issues are raised and hidden interests exist.



Giving the floor to representatives of different stakeholder groups and listening to each other are important elements and characteristics of open dialogues