

Name of exercises: Preparation of Fanski Mountains Nature Protection and Tourism Plan

Location: Shurmashk village, Aini region (North Tajikistan)

Participation exercises under which Article? *Article 7, capacity building*

Purpose of participation exercise:

To involve local people in nature protection and tourism plan processes and to create favourable conditions for small business near the Park.

Background:

The Fanski Mountains are one of the most visited tourist attractions in Central Asia and are situated in Central Tajikistan (the most southern part of the former Soviet Union). Well developed transport links give quick access to the mountains from all over Tajikistan and neighbouring republics.

Every summer, the Fanski Mountains are visited by hundreds of tourists. In the past, their impact on the Nature Park has not been controlled. Furthermore, all the profits from the tourist business went to tourism companies based in Moscow and Tashkent with nothing left in the Park for local people and nature conservation. There is a lot of unemployment in the Fanski Mountains area.

Participation techniques used:

The local community council started discussions with the NGO 'Youth Eco Centre' on the development of the region. Together, the Council and 'Youth Eco Centre' decided that the best way of developing the region was to start a business and to involve local people in it.

Local people were keen to participate in organising the Park and in starting small businesses as most of them were unemployed and had no other job opportunities in the area. The 'Youth Eco Centre' gave them information regarding the environmental impact of tree felling and unregulated tourism. A formal ballot was not held as local people and the local community council were all of the opinion that something had to be done to promote nature conservation and sustainable development in the area.

Who participated?

Decisions were made at meetings by local people. More than 500 members participated out of a population of 1500 in the three villages close to the Park. We held 15 large meetings of more than 50 people each and many smaller meetings with members of the community council which took place in family homes.

On which level they participate?

The initiative came from the local community council. That is why we can say that people participated in the whole process from the beginning and continue to do so.

What information was available?

The NGO Youth Eco Centre provided the local community council with information about similar activities of other groups organising preservation programmes, and with information about how to operate small businesses. The NGO Youth Eco Centre also gave them information about different foreign foundations which support these kinds of activities. All information was delivered in spoken form at meetings.

The local community council has fifty members in three tiers, the oldest people at the top. Below them are the people who have official roles (e.g. chairman of the farmer's community) and finally respectable members of the community.

What was the outcome of the public participation exercise?

As a result of a decision made by local people the Fanski Mountains Nature Park was established. Thanks to the support of the British humanitarian organisation 'Christian Aid', last year the local people began to participate in the tourist business, and running the Fanski Mountains tourism industry themselves.

With foreign investment we built a small hotel and other facilities for the tourists in the Nature Park. Local people began to provide services for the tourists such as selling vegetables and national souvenirs, etc. This provides 20 men with employment and 13 women get small credits from Christian Aid which enable them to make local clothes, household goods and toys which they then sell to tourists as souvenirs. Christian Aid do not require these credits to be repaid so any profits are used to further develop the business and to supply the poorest villagers with essential goods such as food and coal.

Other benefits include reduced litter. In the past "nature lovers" left a lot of rubbish behind them, and the lakes and forests lost some of their real beauty. Every year the NGO Youth Eco Centre would carry out several initiatives to clear the park of rubbish and tins. This is no longer necessary. Organising the Nature Park was the key tool to protect the natural environment and involve local people in the process.

Another benefit includes less tree felling. Some years ago the felling of trees for construction and fuel was at a very high level, as local people didn't have adequate finances to buy these resources for themselves. According to our research, 10,000 juniper trees alone were cut down each year. Now that the business is providing an income, the cutting of trees has stopped within the park and special areas have been provided nearby for the farming of quick growing trees for construction. The profits from the tourist trade and from the provision of services allow local people to buy coal and, with the support of the foreign organisations, to further develop the infrastructure of the park, creating growing employment opportunities. The local economy is now dependent on nature protection and tourist satisfaction.

The development of the tourism has served as the main catalyst for the participation of local people in nature protection. Wishing to build on this success, the local community council, with the support of the NGO Youth Eco Centre, has proposed to the Government of Tajikistan that they should raise the status of the Nature Park to that of National Park. Through involving local people in businesses whose profits are dependent on a thriving local natural environment, we can preserve a unique natural region and, simultaneously, improve the living conditions of the local population.

Comments of participants in process:

In our Central-Asian region the use of economic mechanisms has become a successful way in which to protect nature and to encourage public participation in its protection. People have come to understand that the protection of the nature is not only a necessity in itself but is profitable as well.

Contact: Sergei Vorsin – member of NGO Eco Centre of Dushanbe
Address: Tajikistan, Dushanbe, 734024, Chekhov St. 13, Youth EcoCenter
Phone/Fax: 8 (10-922-372) 216766
E-mail: tabiat@sv.tajik.net
Website: www.glasnet.ru/~sen/tabiat.html

Christian Aid
Website: <http://www.christianaid.ca>