

“Community Empowerment for Mangrove Conservation in Gowatar Bay”

- **Project No.** IRA-G52-2001-004 (IRA98G52)
- **Implementer:** Green Front of Iran
- **Financial support:** GEF/SGP - Iran
- **Technical cooperation:** WWF-Pakistan
- **Location:** Gowatar Bay – Kollani village
- **Duration:** February 2002 – December 2003



Introduction



Sustainable management of mangrove resources is the subject of many national and international programs in different parts of the world today, deemed all the more urgent considering its scarcity and danger of extinction.

Increasingly in recent years, the orientation of activities, in line with the global vision, has been towards the clarification of the role of local communities as major stakeholders regarding this natural resource. This project in Gowatar Bay in the southern-western corner of Iran has attempted to adopt a community-centered approach towards exploring the status



and influence of the mangrove forest in local life and livelihood, placing particular emphasis on the participation and empowerment of the local community for managing local resources, including mangroves.

AND...



Drought, lack of livelihood sources and opportunities, illiteracy and poverty are all common features of the Gowatar region, not least Kollani village – part of the Dashtyari district of Sistan and Baloochestan Province, about 100km from Chabahar and near the border of Pakistan. The villagers of Kollani are the nearest community to the mangrove forests. Kollani is one of



the most deprived villages in the province, lacking access to basic needs such as fresh water, health and education. It is therefore only natural that the local people do not necessarily regard the situation of the forest a priority. The mangrove project was initiated



with a view of this reality, and also based on the belief that humans should be the center of any sustainable development action, and that environmental goals can not be detached from socio-economic development and sustainable livelihood.

Practicing participation in the context of the project



Certainly there are conditions and perhaps requisites for adopting and adapting participatory approaches, such as relatively capable human resources, a theoretical base, adequate flexible planning, and a process-oriented approach. Ultimately, however, much of the effectiveness and sustainability of the process outputs and outcomes will depend on the extent to which the active participation of the local community has been mobilized. In order to generate a growing sense of belonging to, and ownership of the empowerment process, especially amongst the weaker members of the local community, the mobilization should start from the very early stages of the project life cycle. The Mangrove Project has, so far, invested much of its resources into facilitating active community involvement in the various stages of the process, which have included:



- appraisal of local conditions and structures
- assessment and prioritization of community needs
- design and planning of practical initiatives
- phased implementation of the initiatives, managed progressively by local community
- designing and combining awareness and livelihood-related initiatives for weaker household with a participatory model of managing the forest resource
- There have also been features which the project team has consciously and consistently pursued, with the aim of their institutionalization within the project life cycle and beyond:
 - formal and informal gathering of local people, particularly members and/or representatives of the different levels of the local community, to discuss and decide on priorities, solutions and appropriate plans of action
 - meetings and negotiations with relevant stakeholders, including local authorities, aimed at their timely and participatory involvement in the process



- reflection and feedback sessions and reports within the project team and implementing agency, aimed at individual and institutional capacity building

Field Study



Working with the local community in the project area requires a basic and deep knowledge of the status quo in the region, a clear and comprehensive understanding of which would not be possible without the villagers' involvement. The field study phase, comprised of designing a flexible framework, interacting with the community in the field, and reflecting upon findings was carried out over a six month period with these goals in mind:

- A general picture of the local socio-economic and cultural structure , and the area's natural resources conditions
- A description-cum-analysis of the status and role of the mangrove forests in the local life and livelihood
- An in-depth understanding of local/indigenous mechanisms of participatory management of common resources and facilities.
- An identification of local people that could potentially act as catalyst/facilitators in future development activities
- a participatory needs assessment based on socio-economic differences



- An institutional analysis with respect to the relationship between the local community and various governments and non-government organization
- a range of possible inverse activities that could be undertaken in the area , with anticipated roles for the different stakeholders

During the field study phase, the executive team held several inner group sessions in order to analyze and study its data from the field study and compile a document on the socio-economic, natural, cultural situation and group working activities in the area, based on which an action plan could be drawn up. The field study phase finished in September 2002.



Small Projects



The project has aimed to focus on activities that potentially, (a) respond to common needs and issues; and (b) provide an environment conducive to participatory planning and management of public goods, facilities and resources. Some of these include:

- coordination of the construction of a local health care unit and training of local health workers by the relevant Health department
- pursuing the assignment of female teachers to the village
- formation of a local 'working' council, made up of nominated and elected representatives of the different parts of the village community, to pursue the various activities in operation
- mobilizing community expertise and labor in constructing a multi-functional hut library
- pursuing the issuance of insurance and id cards; construction of hygienic toilets; and regular access to drinking water
- trying to facilitate the relation between the local community and local authorities



regarding the status quo in the region

The implementation of the above activities was aimed at local community empowerment and effective participation, and was coordinated with the village working council from the outset. Part of the monitoring of the activities was delegated to small volunteer working groups, and particular attention was paid to the gradual declining role of the outside project team.



Local Community and the Mangrove Forest



The above activities were expected to provide a more participatory context and attitude for planning relatively endogenous innovations for awareness-building, income generation and sustainable management with respect to the mangrove forest. Assessment and practical steps related directly

to the Mangrove Forest have included:

- with various groups and with various transportation, including a four-hour walk with some locals
- a participatory field appraisal of the forest's history, socio-cultural and economic status, actual and potential uses and benefits, and indigenous and traditional methods and techniques of preservation



credits to villagers in order to make a link between their sustainable livelihood and participatory management of mangrove forests

- Sensitization of local authorities sensitive on the threats facing mangrove



forests according to local indigenous knowledge



- Holding a one day camp for the students of the village in order to let them know more about mangrove, its plantation, and to get them familiar with industries in the region that are managed by local people

● The Future...



The project is aiming to establish a micro credit fund in the village in order to create a suitable environment for improving local people's livelihood, specially the marginalized ones; and, through institutionalizing this fund, to create a sustainable relation between the local livelihood and natural resources.

What determines a development project's credibility is its influence on the socio-economic and cultural life of local people, and they should be the ones to judge the impacts. Also, for any activity, especially a pilot, deriving conclusions,



lessons and models from the whole

process demands an extensive review of the different aspects of the project. Therefore a participatory evaluation and reflection within the local community must be considered as the completion stage of this project.



It is expected that these kinds of activities would enable a more participatory environment for grassroots innovative planning for awareness, income generation and sustainable management related to mangrove forests.

And a final word...



In contrast to conventional development initiatives, whereby all stages of the project cycle are geared towards the end results in the form of physical, measurable outputs, a participatory approach places as much stress, if not more, on the process, although the process goes on with lower speed and more problem.

Much of the process will depend on the type and extent of impacts that the project is aiming to have in the area. Intangible human, social, political and cultural impacts are usually afforded much less significance, even though their long-term effects in and around the local communities are probably far more sustained.



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