

# 2 Natural Resource Management in the Tibetan Plateau, China



## Project

### Objectives:

Wildlife management, leading to broader natural resource management with a strong educational component

### Results:

- Enhanced public participation of local inhabitants in planning and implementation processes of wildlife management
- Strengthened communication links between the community, the government and international partners
- Wildlife population increasing as a result of the self-imposed hunting ban and UYO's efforts to educate the people about biodiversity and resource management
- Initiatives for basic education and vocational training are gaining foothold. About 30% of the community's children nowadays receive basic education
- Environmental and health needs assessment being undertaken as a foundation for long-term development plans in Suojia



## Participating organizations

Upper Yangtze Organization (UYO), other NGOs, Chinese government and international organizations

## Background of the community

Suojia, a community of four villages near the centre of the Tibetan plateau, is comprised almost exclusively of pastoralists, nearly 4000 people. Few have had basic education, and over 95% of the women are illiterate. The average income is relatively low, and the quality of people's health, especially that of women and children, is extremely poor. The people manage their own land, and over 95% of them herd livestock, mostly sheep and yak.

## Environmental issues

Environmental conditions on the Tibetan plateau are generally too severe for agriculture and are favorable only for pastoralism.

The grassland vegetation is changing, partly due to regional climatic changes, unsustainable grazing practices, and severe soil erosion.

When mobility is removed from grazing systems, as introduced through new government policies, there is an increased risk of grassland degradation that can result in large-scale environmental and human hazards.

There is a decrease in the number of wildlife, due to illegal hunting.

## Approaches toward community innovation

- Establishment of a grassroots organization promoting community involvement in local environmental management, as well as networking and collaboration with government decision makers and international partners
- An active role of local leaders in environmental conservation
- An active role of external facilitating organizations

## Elements of innovativeness

### Multi-stakeholder partnerships

The UYO was founded by local herdsmen in the 1980's and capitalizes on maintaining and building relationships within the local community as well as with government agencies and external advisors. It combines the ability to mobilize the community with building local capacities, and the establishment of a joint long-term vision.

The UYO formulated a multiple-use land management plan in collaboration with the community and local government, including local nature reserves, protected areas and conservation zones. The success of this initiative is founded on the continuous consultation with local pastoralists.

Suojia's Ecological Protection Committee (EPC), composed of local herders, serves as wildlife monitor and environmental extension service. This form of community participation is already copied in neighboring communities, and is regarded as a model to enhance regional conservation plans.

Basic education with a strong emphasis on environmental education is advocated by the UYO. After discussions, the community decided that formal education was critical for their children's future. The education component became a community-driven project, including management plans and areas such as primary health care, veterinary care, and rangeland management.

### Leadership

In the 1980's, environmental protection work began with a local community leader, participating in a semi-official anti-poaching patrol. He was killed in a gun battle with poachers, but his legacy was continued by relatives and friends, who in 1998 established the UYO.

### Involvement of an external facilitating organization

UYO and its first international partner, Plateau Perspectives (Canada), jointly introduced the notion of public participation for community development. Suojia's Ecological Protection Committee (EPC) succeeded largely due to Plateau Perspectives' support, including training and equipment necessary for wildlife monitoring activities.

## Barriers to innovation

Officials often question the legitimacy of the non-governmental sector. Receiving acceptance or even support for UYO's work is still a very delicate process.

Participation is still interpreted widely, with a broad range from mere information to active involvement of local communities.

## Factors contributing to sustainability

Possibilities for the local community to develop plans reflecting their needs and capacities and implementing these with support from higher government authorities. Whether the local community will be able to build a genuine long-term partnership with the government and other stakeholders remains to be seen.

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