

**Exploring Nature, Wealth and Power Issues in
Agriculture and Resource Management:**

**A Case Study on the Aga Khan Rural Support Program,
Northern Pakistan**

By

Ingrid Nyborg and Jawad Ali

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Department of International Environment and Development Studies/Noragric
Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB)

P.O. Box 5003

N-1432 Aas

Norway

Tel.: +47 64 96 52 00

Fax: +47 64 96 52 01

Internet: <http://www.umb.no/noragric>

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AKRSP	Aga Khan Rural Support Program
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EU	European Union
FD	Forestry department
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GTZ	<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit</i> (German government development agency)
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources-The World Conservation Union
KKH	Karakoram Highway
MACP	Mountain Areas Conservancy Project
NAC	Northern Areas and Chitral (regions in Pakistan)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NRM	Natural resource management
NRSP	National Rural Support Program
NWFP	Northwest Frontier Province
PPI	Physical productive infrastructure
PRSP	Punjab Rural Support Program
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
VO	Village organization
WO	Women's organization
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

Exploring Nature, Wealth and Power Issues in Agriculture and Resource Management: A Case Study on the Aga Khan Rural Support Program, Northern Pakistan

By Ingrid Nyborg¹ and Jawad Ali²

Abstract

The Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP) works in the Northern Areas and Chitral (NAC) regions of Pakistan where it specifically addresses the needs of the poorer rural population through a focus on poverty reduction and increased incomes. The experiences of AKRSP working with village-based organizations in both agricultural development and resource management offer a unique opportunity to examine aspects of environment, wealth and power in the challenging context of the NAC. The program has been evaluated several times by the World Bank and is considered highly successful in terms of relevancy and efficiency. In this paper we present some of the main achievements of AKRSP, particularly in forestry and natural resource management. We discuss AKRSP's particular participatory and democratic approach to development, and the implications of this approach in dealing with power relations in local institutions and government agencies. In terms of environmental activities, we explore AKRSP's experience in tackling issues such as incentives for conservation, investment in environmental management and the development of democratic institutions for resource management. We argue that the lessons to be learned from AKRSP's experiences lie more in a study of processes and principles rather than specific activities. This highlights the need for a different kind of competence on the part of development agents, particularly at the local level, where they must be able to analyze the appropriateness and effectiveness of natural resource management activities in their particular context, rather than merely implementing a set of activities proven effective elsewhere.

Key words: Pakistan, forestry, natural resource management, poverty reduction, development, local institutions, government agencies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP), a non-governmental organization, is part of the Aga Khan Development Network and operates in the Northern Areas³ (NAs) and Chitral⁴ (NAC) regions of Pakistan. While Pakistan has a long history of development projects which

¹ Associate Professor, Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Noragric, Norwegian University of Life Sciences.

² Research Fellow, Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Noragric, Norwegian University of Life Sciences.

³ The Northern Areas (NAs), is a disputed area between Pakistan and India and is administered by the central government in Islamabad. Political institutions do not exist, therefore the people do not have the right to vote for the parliament. The NAs are governed centrally from Islamabad through an administrator appointed by the central government.

⁴ Chitral, with its eastern and northern borders with the NAs, is the northern most district of the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan.

have focused on agricultural production and resource conservation, such development activities in the NAC have been a relatively recent phenomenon. Until completion of the Karakoram Highway⁵ (KKH) and the abolishment of the princely states⁶, this remote, mountainous area enjoyed little development investment. Living conditions were difficult due to a cold, harsh environment, the population was poor, with only approx. 36% of the average per capita income for Pakistan, and they were dependent on small-scale agriculture and the use of local natural resources. In the early 1980s, however, rapid socio-economic changes began to occur in this newly accessible region. The AKRSP was established in 1982 under the inspirational leadership of Shoiab Sultan Khan. AKRSP aimed to specifically address the needs of the poorer rural population through a focus on poverty reduction and increased incomes for the poor. The program, supported by a variety of national and international donors⁷, has been evaluated several times by the World Bank and is considered highly successful in terms of relevancy and efficiency (World Bank, 2002). Several efforts have been made to replicate AKRSP throughout the country and the region⁸. The experiences of AKRSP working with village-based organizations in both agricultural development and resource management over the past 20 years offer a unique opportunity to examine aspects of environment, wealth and power in the challenging context of the NAC. In this paper⁹ we begin by presenting some of the achievements of AKRSP, particularly, but not exclusively, in forestry and NRM. In what ways has AKRSP been considered successful? This is followed with a discussion on approach, participation and democracy, where we examine AKRSP's work in terms of the local and national context, and the implications of this approach in dealing with power relations in local institutions and government agencies. What internal and external factors have contributed to AKRSP's success? We then consider specifically the activities related to the environment, particularly forestry and broader natural resource management. What are the perceived threats to the environment in the project area? What can we say about AKRSP's experience in dealing with environmental activities? What is

⁵ The Karakoram Highway, which was completed in 1985, runs from Islamabad through the NAs to the Chinese border, and is part of the trans-Asian Silk Route.

⁶ The NAC consisted of many princely states and was governed by local princesses. The princely states were abolished in 1972. As a result, the NAs were brought under the direct control of the central government while Chitral became a district of the North West Frontier Province.

⁷ AKRSP has received support from the Aga Khan Foundation, CIDA, NORAD, DFID, the Netherlands, World Bank and EU (AKRSP, 1995).

⁸ National Rural Support Program (NRSP) in Pakistan, and in other South and Central Asian countries, mainly by Aga Khan Foundation.

⁹ The authors would like to extend their thanks to Nazir Ahmad, Regional Program Manager, AKRSP, and Bahadar Nawab, Research Fellow, Department of International Environment and Development Studies, Noragric, Norwegian University of Life Sciences for their valuable comments on this paper.

AKRSP's experience in tackling issues such as incentives for conservation and investment in environmental management and the development of democratic institutions for resource management? Finally, what mechanisms within AKRSP have contributed to a positive learning process? Throughout the paper we will examine both internal and external factors for success as well as for failure.

1.1. INTRODUCTION TO THE AREA

The Northern Area and Chitral (NAC) includes the six northern most districts of Pakistan, namely Ghizar, Gilgit, Diamer, Skardu, Ghancha and Chitral. Due to its placement at the crux of Central and South Asia, lodged between Afghanistan, China, India and Pakistan, NAC has been important strategically throughout history; as a crossroads on the Silk Route; during the colonial period, the cold war and the Great Game; and most recently due to events in Afghanistan and Kashmir. The NAC has also been very important for geological and biological studies due to the highest concentration of mountains and the presence of the world's largest glaciers outside the polar region. Three of the world's largest mountain ranges, the Himalayas, Karakoram and Hindukush meet in this area. Some of the world's highest peaks including K2, the second highest mountain in the world, are situated in this region.

The population of the NAC is 1.2 million and the total area is 74,200 square kilometers (AKRSP, 2004). The economy is subsistence with the average farm size 2.5 hectare, which includes land used for fodder production and areas under farm forest and fruit trees (AKRSP, 1995). Agriculture is based on irrigation that is received from snow melt from the mountains. Major crops grown in the area are maize, wheat, potato and barley. Farm income contributes about 50% to the total household income, the remainder generated from off-farm income (remittances from factory workers, civil servants, employment with army and earning from shops) (AKRSP, 1995). Most of the villages are situated between 1,000 to 3,000 m elevation above sea level. The winters are extremely cold and long, and stretch from November to April with the temperature reaching to -20 °C in December and January. Summer is hot and the temperature reaches 35 °C during July and August.

The area is extremely arid and rocky and classified as mountainous desert. The mean annual precipitation is 250 mm which is mainly received during the winter in the form of snow. Because of extreme aridity, the vegetation cover in the NAC is very low; the total forest cover

has been estimated as 5 percent of the land area (Gohar, 2002). The area falls under three major vegetation types (Schweinfurth, 1957). The lower north-eastern part from the river Indus to about 2,500 m elevation is described as **sub-tropical semi-desert**. The area above the sub-tropical semi desert is classified as the **steppe of Artemisia**, dominated by scrub such as *Artemisia maritima* and *Eurotia ceratoides*. The upper most part consists of snow-covered mountains with inner greener valleys between the mountains. Natural forests are mainly situated in these valleys. Here the average rainfall may reach 400-2000 mm depending on the location (Miehe, 1998). Some of the tree species found in the natural forests are Deodar (*Cedrus deodara*) Blue pine (*Pinus wallichiana*), Chalgosa pine (*Pinus gerardiana*), Juniper (*Juniper excelsa*) and Birch (*Betula utilis*). The main indigenous tree species grown on-farm are Poplar (*Populus nigra*), willow (*Salix spp.*), apricot (*Prunus spp.*), Mulberry (*Morus spp.*) Russian olive (*Eleagnus angustifolia*) and Robinia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*).

The area is also famous for its wild animals that include Snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), Brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), Musk deer (*Moschus moschiferus*), Himalayan ibex (*Capra ibex siberica*), Astore markhor (*Capra falconeri falconeri*), Blue sheep (*ovis nayaur*), Marmot (*Marmota caudate*), Monal pheasant (*lophophorus impejanus*), and Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysactos*). The people keep a mixed herd of domestic animals including cattle, sheep, goats, yaks, dzo (cattle-yak crossbreed), horses, and donkeys.

Demand for timber and firewood is very high because of the extreme and long winters. The average daily per capita firewood consumption has been reported as 2 and 4 kg during the summer and winter respectively (Ali and Benjaminsen, 2004). Over the years the local demand for timber and firewood has increased more than the population growth due to increased per capita consumption of energy as a result of increased living standards (AKRSP, 1995). For cooking and heating purposes, 94% of the villagers are dependent upon firewood in addition to a dramatically increased demand from down-country after the Northern Areas (NAs) and its valleys were opened up by the Karakoram Highway and the valley was linked by roads (ibid.). For example, in 1978, only 1400 m³ of timber was extracted while between 1980-1991 a steady production of over 28,000 m³ per year was extracted. In addition, large quantities of timber have been extracted unofficially by the timber mafia both for local use and transportation to down country (Ali and Benjaminsen, 2004; Gohar, 2002). Unofficial timber extraction is reported to be 10 times the official figures (AKRSP, 1995). Thus the scarce natural vegetation in the NA has been severely degraded (Ali and Benjaminsen, 2004;

Gohar, 2002,). To stop further depletion of the natural vegetation, AKRSP, in collaboration with the local communities, initiated large-scale tree planting in irrigated plantations, where indigenous tree species including *Populus nigra*, *Salix spp.* *Morus spp.* *Prunus Spp.*, *Eleagnus angustifolia* and *Robinia pseudoacacia* were grown. The irrigated plantations produced fuel and timber, serving as alternative sources to the scarce natural forests in the area.

Reliable data on wildlife populations in the NAC are not available. Recent wildlife population surveys in some valleys, however, suggest that the wildlife population has increased during the last 10 years as a result of conservation efforts (IUCN, 2004). For example, in Basho valley 47 Himalayan ibex were found in 1997 while the number of animals increased to 91 in 2001. In Kachura valley there were 87 Himalayan ibex in 1997, which increased to 230 in 2001, while in Hushay valley Himalayan ibex increased to 1,293 in 2000 compared to 101 in 1995. Wildlife population surveys in the area are difficult because of the difficult terrain and migratory nature of wild animals. Therefore, the abrupt increase in wildlife populations in some areas might have been due to double counting as a result of migration of wildlife from one area to another. Because of the apparent increased population of some of the wild animals, trophy hunting was allowed in the area in 1999.

1.2. DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN THE NAC

When AKRSP started working in the NAC, the area was one of the poorest and most inaccessible in all of Pakistan. Except for those who served in the army or the government, villagers were almost completely dependent on small-scale subsistence agriculture (Gloekler, 2003). Per capita income was approximately 36 percent of the average for Pakistan (AKRSP, 1992) and most rural areas were still dominated by a barter-subsistence economy. Literacy was the lowest in Pakistan, about 17%, with only 5-6% of women able to read and write. Irrigated agriculture and pastoral transhumance are the most important components of the prevailing mixed farming system. Forestry and agriculture are not possible without irrigation. Thus, irrigation channels were an important component in the farming systems of the area.

Only a few varieties of vegetables were grown (Hussain, 1993), and staple crops were supplemented with various wild fruits, roots and weeds. Livestock breeds, including local cattle as well sheep and goats, had relatively low milk and meat production, and emphasis was put on large herd sizes for food security and as a mobile bank. Livestock mortality was high, estimated between 10-15 percent per annum. Dependency on common wild resources,

including pastures and natural forests was crucial for survival, particularly in those villages at higher elevations.

The time when AKRSP began its work was also marked by rapid socio-economic change, largely due to better communication through the opening of new roads and passes coupled with an increasing problem of small, fragmented landholdings. The combination resulted in an increasing trend towards seasonal male migration to the cities and down-country for work and education, and this resulted in labor shortages. As a result of this, women were becoming increasingly involved in farming activities and the pasture culture declined (Gloekler, 2003).

1.3. MEETING THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES: AKRSP'S INTEGRATED, PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Thus, AKRSP was faced with a challenging situation, with difficult environmental and social conditions in a rapidly changing context. Initially, AKRSP focused on building local institutions [village organizations (VOs) and women's organizations (WOs)] through which they could assist farmers to increase their production, incomes and more actively link with the social, political and economic changes occurring in the region as a whole. Its agriculture program concentrated on the development of new agricultural lands through infrastructure development, the training of villagers and the organization of a reliable system of input supplies with emphasis on fertilizer loans and the introduction of new crop varieties. Acting as an intermediary, AKRSP initially supplied a wide range of inputs, including fertilizer, insecticides, seeds, and threshers directly to the VOs and WOs, some of these free, some subsidized, and others backed by a credit program (AKRSP, 1983). Eventually, many of these activities were turned over to village specialists (agricultural, forestry and livestock) trained by AKRSP.

Forestry activities came more strongly into AKRSP's portfolio after an initial pilot project in the late 1980s showed the strong interest farmers had in investing in tree-planting activities for fodder, firewood and timber – all scarce resources in the NAC. One of the important foresights regarding NRM that came out of the forestry work was the idea of super-VO level institutions to help planning at valley and watershed levels (IUCN, 1987). The forestry program thus played an important role in promoting collective action and institution building at the community level. Free grazing control and collective bans on poaching and illegal forest cutting were some of the major achievements in this regard. This work also led to the

establishment of linkages with other organizations working in the area, such as WWF and IUCN, as well as the Government that, due to a lack of capacity and experience in working directly with the villagers, requested AKRSP to implement their Social Forestry Project. In the early phases of collaboration between AKRSP and other organizations, the roles of the different organizations were sometimes unclear and led to frustration, particularly on the part of ARKSP. For example, AKRSP was quite active at the grassroots level together with IUCN, which was not visible in IUCN's work. Over time, however, these roles have been clarified through more formal agreements such as the MACP, where AKRSP is clearly responsible for social mobilization efforts, while others (IUCN, WWF, Government Forest Department) have the responsibility for the technical aspects and policy issues (albeit with input from AKRSP). This has resulted in much more fruitful collaboration at the policy level, avoiding replications, and resulting in a more concerted effort to address environmental and development issues in the NAC (Ali, 2003). Nevertheless, there are still problems at the implementation level, with different organizations giving different messages to communities. There is a need for further coordination.

One of the keys to AKRSP's success in achieving a positive impact in the NAC has always been its integrated, participatory approach. Although the organization has been comprised of different sections for implementation, there has always been an emphasis on integrated planning, particularly at the village level. This was an important part of how the dialogs with the communities were conducted – all of the AKRSP sub-sections were represented and had to participate in the initial discussions with the communities which laid the premises for future development activities. The dialogs also emphasized participation from the entire community, although in most cases this meant the male half of the community, since it was in many areas not possible at that point in time to include women in village gatherings and elicit their direct participation. Much of the participation in practice, however, was achieved through interaction with the VOs, and later the WOs, in the implementation of the various land development and infrastructural activities. Thus, social development through these organizations was an important component, however not one which was a separate activity. Institutional development was intimately tied to the practice of NRM.

This integration had an impact beyond more efficient project implementation; it changed the entire manner in which development in the area was perceived, by both officials and villagers. Water channels, roads, power generation and tree plantations were important tools to bring

remote villages out of relative isolation and increase production of crops and trees for timber, fuelwood and firewood. These were, however, traditionally considered as exclusively government responsibilities. AKRSP, through its integrated, participatory approach, was able to construct these at a much lower cost, but more importantly, with the active collaboration of villagers. Perceptions thus changed on who was responsible or 'owned' these investments. In Basho valley, for example, the villagers joined together on their own initiative and widened the valley's government-constructed road – something which would have been unheard of in the past.

AKRSP's participatory approach, particularly in land development, thus represented a dramatic change from the conventional way the government developed land and infrastructure. Land development schemes in Pakistan have most often been implemented through what may be called a managerial approach to development (Husain, 1992). Such projects are typically identified, designed and implemented by technical experts and managers according to pre-determined blue prints out of a centralized government agency. Beneficiaries and the community do not have any control over the project. The participatory approach introduced by AKRSP, however, was very different. Communities were given greater control of their development agenda by being involved in all stages of project planning. They identified, prioritized and implemented projects addressing their needs and forged the necessary linkages for technical and financial assistance (ibid.). AKRSP provided technical assistance, but the communities were also active in designing solutions, something which is reflected in the diversity of solutions in land development. The community was given the ultimate decision making power, and could reject any project design which did not suit their needs. The success of this approach was reflected not only in the increased ability of communities to conduct development activities on their own, but also the economic returns. According to the World Bank, the AKRSP approach led to high impacts and rates of return (World Bank 2002). An AKRSP survey of 13 land development projects, for example, has shown that the internal rates of return range from 13 percent to 56 percent, with only three projects having internal rates of returns below 20 percent (AKRSP, 2000 quoted in Gloekler, 2003).

Another important aspect of AKRSP's approach was in the training of village specialists. In each village, for example, a villager was trained as a forestry specialist. This village specialist was to act as a resource person for the entire village and a contact person with AKRSP. The

forestry specialist was responsible for monitoring survival rates, giving advice on management, giving on-site training, and transportation of plants from the nurseries to the village. They contributed not only technically, but played an important role in motivating the villagers, and represented an important network of people who were knowledgeable and environmentally aware in the entire NAC. They were not the only resource people in the village. AKRSP trained several specialists for different purposes in each village (e.g. poultry management, plant protection, book keeping, VO managers) such that there was a cadre of at least 6 development-oriented contact people in each village. In addition, master trainers were trained for providing services at a valley level, and eventually took responsibility for input supply. These contact people had considerable negotiating power within the village in terms of being able to lobby for change with the village leadership. In addition to formal training, thousands of villagers took part in exposure trips to other parts of the region and country to learn from others and share their own experiences. In addition, AKRSP had several field-based staff (social organizer, accountant and engineer) that had regular, close contact with the communities. Since their area of responsibility was relatively small in relation to the entire program area, they were able to visit the communities frequently, get to know the community members well, and provide valuable feedback to both the communities about AKRSP packages and programs, and to AKRSP management about the developments in the villages. Thus, we see that even in areas where activities in collaboration with AKRSP were discontinued, those who were trained continue as important activists for their communities.

Integrated NRM planning and the NRM pilot project's experience in some valleys also led to the realization that common property management and wild natural resources play an important role in small farmers' livelihood strategies. VO-led initiatives in common property management began to spread quickly once villagers realised that this would give them greater control over their wild resources. This resulted in numerous successful community based projects, most notably the Bar Valley Project with assistance from WWF, the Khunjerab Buffer Zone (funded by UNDP/GEF), Chalt-Chaprote and the numerous valleys participating in the IUCN implemented project called *Maintaining Biodiversity in Pakistan with Rural Community Development*, as well as research work supported by EU (Gloekler, 2003) and NORAD (Wisborg, *et.al.* 1998).

Since AKRSP was established, its overall objective has remained to increase the capacity of the local people to become involved in their own development so they can improve their

income and welfare in a sustainable and equitable manner (World Bank, 1990). In the wake of the abolishment of the princely states and before government services were able to play a larger role in the area, development workers assumed that there was an institutional gap in the NAC. One of the aims of AKRSP was thus to promote the establishment of institutions at the village level which could link with external actors, act as development agents and form the basis of democratic local government in the future. The approach chosen by AKRSP was the establishment of VOs and WOs. These organizations were formed through what AKRSP calls its 'diagnostic approach'. The diagnostic approach involves a series of dialogs with the communities, where the first dialog involves meeting with the entire community and introducing the AKRSP's philosophy of participatory development and program activities. The second dialog involves the identification and technical feasibility of potential projects. The third dialog formalizes an agreement with the community defining the framework for the implementation of activities. In the first and the third dialog, all of the VO members are required to be present, such that there is transparency in the planning process. For example, all of the details of who is providing which resources for infrastructural investments are presented, such that resources cannot be appropriated by special interests.

The VOs were set up along democratic lines, where leadership was elected and represented the majority of the community, with a minimum of 60% of the community being members, (however in most villages only a few households chose not to join). Participation was to be ensured through meeting attendance and open discussion, as well as activities performed together, such as water channel construction and maintenance, and tree planting. These organizations were thus formed to influence power relations at the village level such that development decisions had a broad base in the community, rather than being confined to a few influential individuals or families. The VOs did not necessarily represent an entirely new organization, but were often an adapted form of the existing village structure. Thus, in some cases the formation of the VO was along traditional power interests in the communities, but in other cases the process resulted in a change in village leadership, which indicates that the VOs often gave voice to other interests in the community.

Given the importance of natural resources to the livelihoods of the NAC population, AKRSP chose to organize its main social development activities around agriculture, livestock, forestry and engineering services, supported by other components such as monitoring and evaluation, women and development, credit and savings, and enterprise development. Activities in the

community were centered on the establishment of a physical productive infrastructure (PPI), which in most cases was a water channel, link road, or micro-hydroelectric plant¹⁰. These activities provided an incentive to communities, motivating them to organize and participate in development activities. They also represented an important part of AKRSP's development philosophy at that point in time, where increases in income were seen as an important means to achieve development (through for example provision of credit and enterprise development), increased agricultural production (crops and animals) was seen as the means to achieve increased income (technology transfer paradigm), and land development was seen as the key to increase agricultural production (opening of new areas and intensification of agriculture).

One of the most important land development activities was the construction of water channels. Agriculture in these areas is based on a complex system of channels which feed snow melt into agricultural areas in the summer months. With the help of AKRSP in the construction of new channels, communities could expand their cultivable land areas considerably. Much of the assistance from AKRSP went to the productive development of these new land areas for crops, trees and/or fodder. It was this increase in production which was to form the basis of increases in income for the rural poor, with AKRSP's further assistance through the provision of technical advice and an extensive savings and credit scheme.

After some time working with the communities on land development, AKRSP began to realize the important connection between the activities 'below the channels' and those above. The linkage between high pasture, forests and other natural resources to the rest of the farming activities became clearer, and AKRSP began to expand its focus to include a broader understanding of NRM and livelihoods. A wider array of resource management issues were brought to the fore, including the need to understand and deal with conflicts and interests both within and beyond the village.

¹⁰ For which AKRSP received the 2004 International Green Oscar Award for providing clean energy for tens of thousands of households in the NAC.

2. LINKAGES BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT, ECONOMIC CONCERNS AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

2.1. THREATS TO NATURAL RESOURCES: ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES?

There are many general theories on what constitutes threats to the natural environment, for example, poverty, poor policy, war, economic interests. There are also just as many theories on how to best deal with these threats, i.e. increasing incomes, stricter policy and enforcement, establishing democratic institutions. All of these theories are built on assumptions about how people relate both to each other and to their environment. We find, however, that the actual processes of degradation and thus the threats to the environment are quite context specific, and thoroughly embedded in the local socio-cultural, historical, political, economic complex. In this section we consider the threats relevant to this area, and try to give an indication of how AKRSP has tried to address these threats through their activities.

2.1.1. Competing interests for forest resources

In general, AKRSP has from its conception considered poverty as a threat to the resource base, in that it is assumed that those with limited options for subsistence and income will continue to use and sell natural resources. Thus, AKRSP has chosen in general to support the more efficient use of the resource base through agricultural development, off-farm income opportunities, better forest and wildlife management, and development of alternative sources for, for example, timber and firewood through plantation promotion. Recent research, however, has shown that it is in fact the better-off who are the most active over-exploiters of, for example, forest resources, so the threats to the forests are much more complex than first considered (Ali and Benjaminsen, 2004). This has resulted in more attention by AKRSP to the importance of understanding the interests of different actors, how they interact with the environment, and then becoming engaged in mediating conflicts and negotiations over resources.

One serious threat to the environment is the sale of wood from the natural forest, especially timber, by people linked with the timber business, supported by the government forest department. This link in Pakistan is referred to as the timber mafia (Yusufzai, 1992). Earlier, the only source of wood was through establishing a link with the forest department to gain

access to the resources from the natural forests. As the afforestation program developed, however, more trees became available for sale on the market, making it less necessary to obtain wood from the natural forest. The increase in the supply of wood from plantations served to weaken the link between the people in the wood business and the forestry department. This has also reduced the pressure on the natural forest. However, the pine forest continues to be under pressure for procurement of quality timber.

Since there was a strong initial resistance from the forestry department, AKRSP from the beginning tried to involve the forestry department in the afforestation program rather than to confront them, while continuing to operate within what previously was considered the forest department's domain. This was done through assisting the forestry department in the implementation of their own programs, as well as through supporting individual staff through training and inclusion in some of the activities where they could share their expertise with the communities. This contact with individual forestry department staff, as well as strategic support from the NAC administration that had authority over the forest service in the region, was an important strategy to overcome the initial strong resistance to the overall program by the forestry department. Through this process, they learned to work with the communities, and came to realize that the communities could actually establish and manage their own nurseries and plantations. They also were given the opportunity to initiate their own activities together with communities, both in collaboration with AKRSP and directly. So, the program did not only provide technical support, it also addressed the social and political threats posed by powerful stakeholders, but in a way that did not alienating them.

2.1.2. Inherent scarcity of natural resources and absence of alternatives sources of energy

Whereas most temperate zone areas have large forest cover, this area is unique in the world since it is both extremely cold and extremely arid. This has resulted in a very low vegetation cover. Before AKRSP there were not many alternative sources of energy and building materials, and people were only dependent on the natural vegetation. In addition to the timber mafia, local people were compelled to exploit these resources, leading to severe depletion of certain, valuable resources such as natural forests. By the time AKRSP started its work, there were already indications of severe degradation of the forests in this area. Due to the socio-economic and political situation in the area, population growth and the development of urban centers was rapid from the early 1980s, putting increasing pressure on the natural resources.

Natural forests were rapidly disappearing. In such a situation, a conventional conservationist response would have been to concentrate on the protection of the remaining forests through the restriction of local use. This, however, is a particular challenge in this area, given the extreme scarcity of resources, the increasing demand for these resources by a growing population, the slow growth of natural vegetation due to high elevation and low precipitation and high per capita consumption of energy for heating due to extremely cold and long winters. Protection alone would be inadequate and would not be addressing the root causes of forest exploitation. AKRSP, therefore, decided on a different approach. Rather than a focus on pure forest conservation, AKRSP focused on community needs in relation to resources and their use. One idea was to promote the establishment of plantations which would address their increasing need for firewood and timber, and at the same time reduce the demand for firewood and timber from the natural forests.

2.1.3. Weak NRM institutions

Another threat to the natural environment has been weak institutional arrangements in the management of natural resources. The NAC has been an exceptional area in the sub-continent as there was no formal institution for forestry until the 1960s. This is despite the fact that the forestry services in the rest of the sub-continent have been one of the most well-organized forest services in the world since its colonial origins in the 18th century. The forest services in the sub-continent were not organized originally for conservation, but to ensure protection of the forests for a continued supply of timber for commercial purposes by the colonial rulers (Schickhoff, 1998). Since NAC was a resource-scarce area, it was not an interesting area for forest exploitation. The forest services in post-colonial Pakistan which was extended to the NAC in the 1960s continued functioning with an emphasis on the protection of resources for use by the state. Conservation and regeneration were not a function of the forest services. In addition, they had no tradition of working together with communities in the management of resources, and their view of communities was that the people represented a threat to the sustainability of the forests. There was no institution which considered the establishment of plantations on a large scale to overcome the inherent resource scarcity and increasing demands for forest products in the area, nor was there any institution which had the competence to address broader conservation and sustainable use issues.

To address this threat, AKRSP has been involved in several types of activities. They established plantations, environmental education in schools, and collaboration with VOs and

WOs to create a joint awareness about the environment. They have also encouraged linkages with other agencies that were working to conserve the environment in the area such as IUCN, WWF and the government. Competence building of formal (forest service, NGOs) and informal institutions (community organizations), and human resource development of villagers (training and education) was also a central component.

3. MEASURING SUCCESS: EXAMPLES OF AKRSP'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Since 1982, about USD 50 million have been invested by AKRSP in the NAC (AKRSP, 2004). AKRSP provides technical support and materials not available in the area, while the communities share labor, land and locally available material. The achievements of AKRSP so far have been remarkable compared to investment (World Bank, 1990, 1995, 2002). Because of the absence of baseline data it has not been possible for AKRSP to separate completely AKRSP's contribution from that of the government and private sector (World Bank, 2002). However, the World Bank recognized that after AKRSP's intervention, income of the villagers has increased by 10 to 50 percent. Death rates, especially women and children, which have been particularly high in the areas have been reduced because of access to hospitals as a result of link roads constructed with the help of AKRSP. In addition, earning in villages where AKRSP operates is higher than those few villages where AKRSP has not yet initiated its activities. AKRSP's facilitation of other NGOs in the field has also had indirect effects on the quality of life in the area, through, for example, increased awareness and interest in education, particularly girls' education, and increased awareness of health, hygiene and family planning, for both men and women.

AKRSP's quantitative achievements have been well documented (World Bank, 1991, 1996, 2002). For example, the World Bank (2002) reported that economic efficacy of AKRSP's program has been highly satisfactory. Income has increased beyond the original target of doubling in real terms. The benefits of the program have thus been more than sufficient to justify the cost. The estimated economic rate of return closer to 25 to 30% suggests that the investments have been sound. Furthermore the program has been very effective in building social capital and capacity of the beneficiaries. The program has also become a laboratory for rural development; eight major rural development programs in Pakistan have drawn substantially from AKRSP experience, including the World Bank's Poverty Alleviation Project. Additional indicators of AKRSP's quantitative achievements are given in Table 1.

Table 1. AKRSP's Quantitative Achievements

No. of VOs	2 529
No. of WOs	1 709
No. of village specialist trained	18 019
No. of fruit trees planted (in millions)	3.9
No. of farmers involved in breed improvement	11 797
No. of improved breeds* supplied	6 729
No. of forest plants planted (in millions)	37.4
No. of infrastructural projects initiated	2 677
Amount of land area developed (ha)	114 841
No. of enterprises supported	696
Savings by V/WOs (in USD millions)	8.42
No. of loans dispersed	37 013

*cattle, sheep, goats, poultry. Source: AKRSP Annual Review 2004

According to the Farm Household Income Expenditure Surveys conducted by AKRSP since 1991 (AKRSP 1992), per household farm incomes in the NAC have increased almost by tenfold. With farm income still constituting 60 percent of total income (World Bank 2002), this increase is quite significant. Much of this increase can be attributed to AKRSP (Gloekler 2003). Furthermore, the improved wheat and maize varieties and other inputs delivered through the NRM activities have significantly increased cereal production; cropping intensity between 1991-97 has increased by 15 percent. Growth in fruits, vegetables, livestock, potato seeds and fodder production has increased farm incomes. Per-capita farm incomes in real terms increased by 2.7 times from Pakistani rupees 2,647 in 1991 to 7,046 in 1997 (Gloekler, 2003).

More recently, several attempts have been made to examine the qualitative aspects of AKRSP's activities (Wood and Shakil, 2003; Gloekler and Seeley, 2003; Gloekler, 2003), as well as the influence these activities have had in sectors other than those directly addressed through the organization. More qualitative indicators of success include the following, several of which will be discussed in detail in the remaining sections of the paper:

- *Contributions to human resource development.* AKRSP has made extensive contributions to human resource development, both through training of village specialists, and overseas training. AKRSP had an active program of sending young women and men for overseas training and degrees, something which was almost non-existent for young people from this area in the past. Skills and knowledge developed during trainings have led to the introduction and adaptation of useful technology, such as vegetable growing and improved fruit processing techniques. It has in particular

contributed to the ability of women to participate in technology development and improve their local status. Those women who have taken part in trainings, both for WO management and agriculture and resource management are now able to communicate better with outside institutions. Also, through their involvement in WOs, women have become more active in formal fora, increasing their participation in a broader range of village activities as well as in development work with different institutions.

- *Institutional development and strengthening for local initiation of activities.* The VO members are able to work towards new goals, undertake other development activities and make linkages with other institutions on their own. There are increasing numbers of examples of locally initiated collective action, either under the auspices of VOs or their off-shoots. More formal institutions have also been established as a result of AKRSP activities. For example, the amount of savings generated through AKRSP's credit program is extensive (AKRSP, 1995), and has prompted the formation of the First Micro Finance Bank in Pakistan.
- *Local democratic governance and participation in land development and common pool resource management.* While land development and common pool resource management is in itself not new, the way it was intensified and organized through participatory, democratic processes has allowed for increased sharing of power in decision-making, and wider sharing of benefits across the community. There is also increased awareness of the community members in environmental issues, both in terms of land quality, wildlife management, and biodiversity. In addition, the sheer number of organizations formed in the NAC has created an incredible potential for reaching and interacting with the rural population, and this network has been used in recent attempts to mobilize the rural population for the formation of local and district councils.

3.1. ACHIEVEMENTS IN FORESTRY AND NRM

As in many South Asian countries, conventional forestry activities in the NAC were 'conservationist', concentrating on the conservation and regeneration of natural forests. AKRSP, however, took a different approach, where forestry activities were an integral part of their overall development approach. Forestry in AKRSP thus meant social forestry or agroforestry, rather than regeneration. Activities were always seen in combination with social and livelihood needs, and defined by the villager rather than foresters. The impact, however, has gone beyond addressing household livelihood needs. These plantations in fact now provide the bulk of firewood and timber to urban markets, and wood from natural forests constitutes only a small portion of the wood sold. In addition to these plantations serving as an alternative source of wood, they also are contributing to increasing the biodiversity in the area. The areas used for plantations are mainly areas where there is either no or extremely limited grassy vegetation, and were considered unproductive and extremely marginal by the

communities. This makes the establishment of plantations in this area rather unique, in that they, in most cases, did not compete with agricultural or even grazing land. Most of the land used for plantations was newly developed land through the establishment or extension of irrigation channels. Trees were also planted on agricultural land, but by individuals on private holdings, who considered this a good agricultural investment.

In this process, a major shift occurred in people's perceptions of who owned both the trees and the knowledge of tree management. Earlier, tree-planting was recognized as the job of the government forestry department, who saw their work as scientific and technical, assuming local people did not have the competence to plant their own trees. Thus, although people themselves could and were planting trees, they were discouraged, as growing trees was thought to be the responsibility of the government forest department (FD). In addition, with limited resources and staff in the forest department, the limited number of trees available was rationed. Therefore, large-scale tree planting never took off prior to AKRSP's involvement, despite the fact that people knew the tree-planting techniques, and there was a demand. AKRSP was able to realize the potential of the people doing it themselves. AKRSP added a little scientific knowledge to the existing knowledge to improve the quality of tree planting, and successfully transferred the responsibility of tree planting from the government to the local population themselves.

By working closely with communities in the establishment of tree plantations, AKRSP also learned traditional techniques from the communities which it was able to spread to other areas as innovations in tree management. This was possible because unlike other development projects at that time which introduced fast-growing exotic species, this project used indigenous species, about which the local people had knowledge. For example, it was generally assumed that banning free-grazing was necessary for the successful establishment of plantations. This project showed, however, that animals could be together with trees, and that the trees could be protected using traditional techniques, i.e. wrapping the trunks with cloth, spreading manure and clay on the trunks and coppicing the trees when they reach a certain height to encourage re-growth where the goats could not reach. In other cases, however, areas were enclosed. The protection was left entirely to the community how they manage and protect their plants. This flexible approach resulted in a variety of strategies for tree-planting and protection.

Another achievement of the forestry/NRM activities was the high adaptability: once a demonstration was proven successful, other communities became interested in implementing it. There are also examples of communities establishing plantations completely on their own, although the extent of this has not yet been documented. The interest in planting trees, however, can also be seen in how the communities have prioritized their land use. One of the early conditions of AKRSP was to use a minimum of 10% of the newly developed land from infrastructural development projects supported by AKRSP on forest plantation. This was due to the acute shortage of forest products in the region, and was based on the assumption that people in the short run would use the entire land for crop production. But, in practice, more than 50% of the land has been developed as forest plantations, showing the interest in investing in trees.

Technically, the plantations established with the assistance of AKRSP have enjoyed high survival rates: 70-90%. This is a considerable achievement, as these are trees which are water demanding, planted in an area which is water scarce, and on land which is marginal, mainly steep slopes. Also, rather than leading to erosion through the disturbance of natural conditions, the trees have instead led to soil formation. In fact, communities have reported that wildlife has actually increased as a result of the establishment of plantations, in particular bird populations.

Another major achievement of the forestry/NRM activities has been the production of sorely needed fodder through a strategy of intercropping of highly nutritional fodder and trees. In conventional forestry, fodder and trees can be in competition – trees are grown more closely spaced which suppresses grass growth. This is why people in some cases do not want trees and the foresters don't want grasses in plantations. But in this case the forestry package was designed from the beginning such that both trees and grasses were produced. This was accomplished by planting trees in a wider spacing and intercropping fodder crops such as alfalfa. This strategy resulted in a shift from free-grazing to stall feeding, especially for those who keep only a few animals, i.e. the poor, who did not have enough land to produce fodder or enough labor to participate in the grazing turn-system. These animals in the past were left for grazing in the village areas, causing a lot of damage to crops and trees. With the fodder production in the plantations, however, these people could now stall-feed their animals with the fodder they received, since they were also included in the benefits from these plantations. Also, the land development impact study (AKRSP, 2000 quoted in Gloekler, 2003) has shown

that increases in livestock (particularly improved cattle breeds) in conjunction with fodder production increases are commonly found throughout the program area. For example, in the Aishi Paen area, there has been a 250 percent increase in the number of livestock per household. The Chalt and Ghulapan assessment reported doubling fodder production since before the project. The fodder security contributed to an increase in the number of livestock, which in turn increased the consumption of livestock by-products by the households.

Since this was an area with a high demand for firewood and timber, and vegetation in general is scarce, another important criterion for success has been the number of trees planted. Since the establishment of the program, about 40 million trees have been raised and 1,500 private nurseries were established (World Bank, 2002). This involved provision of large amounts of cuttings, which the government nurseries were not able to supply. To provide cuttings, AKRSP established nurseries, which were eventually turned over to either small or large-scale private interests, a further indicator of success is that it decreased the dependence of villagers on inputs provided directly by the project, or by the government. While the large-scale nurseries are likely to close down once AKRSP stops purchasing plants from these nurseries (a part of a plan to cut down on subsidies), the hundreds of small nurseries will continue to meet the local demand. AKRSP's vision of establishing small nurseries was to build on a long tradition of maintaining small fruit nurseries in the villages. These small nurseries provide seedlings to the growers within the village, where there is social pressure to ensure quality. Also, the maintenance of plantations is good; they still exist in all the communities, and are generally well-managed. AKRSP policy has been such that the subsidies in the form of new cuttings have been decreasing over the project period. Despite this, the number of plants planted have been increasing. Currently, incentives are still given to communities who are establishing new plantations. However, the overall policy in AKRSP is to cut subsidies altogether. It is unclear how this will affect the establishment of new plantations in the NAC. A recent study conducted by AKRSP concludes that communities will not necessarily be able to make such initial investments on their own, and that the establishment of new plantations will thus decrease substantially (Hussain and Bulman, 2002).

Finally, the integrated NRM program played an important role in empowering the community members such that they gained control over their resources in terms of ownership and decision-making. The training of village specialists and other VO members gave people

power over their own development. Training was not only in technical aspects, but also in managerial skills, accounting, and in some areas in proposal writing so they could continue to initiate activities in collaboration with others in the future. There was a focus on forging strong linkages between the community and other actors to ensure that the communities were not dependent on the organization which initially motivated them to organize for their own development.

3.2. FACTORS INFLUENCING AKRSP'S SUCCESS

3.2.1. External factors: context, approach, participation, democracy

AKRSP was established both at a time and place and under conditions which can be seen as unique in the region. It is important to understand these conditions to see how and under what circumstances the experiences of AKRSP might be useful for other organizations working in the region.

The strategic location of the NAC has made it an interesting area politically for the initiation of activities by many national and international organizations. In addition, this area represents an important area in terms of global biodiversity, and is thus of interest to many international conservation organizations such as WWF and IUCN. There are, for example, several rare and endangered animal species and a large area in NAC has been put under conservation¹¹. Because of its relative remoteness to bureaucratic national control, it has also been an area which has been considered relatively easy to work in. Thus, a relatively large number of multilateral development organizations have established themselves in the area such as IUCN, WWF, UNDP, EU, as well as various bilateral agencies i.e. NORAD, CIDA, GTZ and DFID.

The area also has an interesting history in terms of the way in which local power structures have functioned and shifted in the last century. Until the early 1970s, the area was governed by local princes, who were succeeded by bureaucratic institutions with decisions controlled by the central government in Islamabad. When AKRSP initiated its activities in 1982, formal democratic institutions were still missing from the political landscape. Nevertheless, informal

¹¹ Reliable figures on how much of the area actually has been put under conservation are not available. However, it is believed that around 50% of the total land area is under conservation. This includes Chitral Goal, Deosai, Kunjerab, Central Karakorum National Parks and the area protected under the Mountain Area Conservatory Project. In addition there are numerous game reserves and wildlife sanctuaries.

democratic institutions, both in the form of VOs and district councils, could be and were relatively easily introduced. This was because even when the monarchy was in place, village society was more or less democratic, in that most of the daily decisions were made through a selected body in every village, a *jirga* system, comprised of the elders in the community. This *jirga* system was an integral part of the community, often exercising its role in the context of social events in the village such as weddings and religious celebrations. This *jirga* system of the NAC was quite different than, for example, the *jirga* system of the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP). In NWFP, the *jirga* was permanent, and it was comprised of landlords and tribal lords. This was, however, not the case in NAC. The *jirga* system here was based on one's ability to make fair decisions and general respect within the community. People in these villages trusted their leadership, agreeing, for example, to give them money for establishing savings. Those members of the *jirga* who were shown to be bad decision-makers lost their positions in the *jirga*. The local princes, who often controlled large pieces of land, were in fact outside this system. The remaining society was more or less homogenous when it came to resources, and therefore the communities were not very differentiated. There were some class differences, but these were not cemented. Also, the power of the princesses was based on labor rather than land, which, once they lost their ability to command labor, left the princesses essentially powerless (Wood and Malik, 2003).

Thus, one of the reasons why AKRSP has been so successful in initiating village organizations might be attributed to this history of relative local democracy, something which is rare in Pakistan given its feudalism and tribalism. Dialogs in the villages where all had to discuss and agree on development activities could not have been possible if there had been big class differences, and people did not have a tradition of open discussion. This tradition of open discussion has continued despite increasing differences in resource access and control in the villages, and the powerful interests inside and outside the villages such as the timber mafia. AKRSP took full benefit of this, and was witness to active discussions at community level, albeit without the direct participation of women. In addition, AKRSP itself had a democratic nature – great emphasis was put on egalitarianism within the organization, which was also rather unique considering the hierarchical nature of most organizations in Pakistan. AKRSP has been replicated in several other regions of Pakistan, however these have not managed to be successful on many counts. Open discussions during dialogs, for example, have not always been possible at village level in other areas of Pakistan, where power differences in the communities are more pronounced, often based on a feudal system, and

villagers not as economically homogenous as in the NAC. Democracy and participation, in these other areas, therefore, face different challenges.

Another important characteristic of the area was that there was a lot of donor interest – the international climate was favorable for investments in the area, due to its strategic position *vis à vis* the Soviet Union and Afghanistan. AKRSP began as a humanitarian organization, with no concept of limited timeframe for activities. They received a lot of funding due to their successes and donor interest in the area. Pakistan, which was resisting the Soviet invasion (physically and ideologically), was supportive of development initiative in the areas bordering Afghanistan and China. Therefore, AKRSP also received vigorous support from the army authorities which ruled Pakistan during the period of AKRSP's establishment. This is evident from the fact that numerous Pakistani heads of state and international dignitaries (diplomats, royalty), have visited AKRSP in the NAC.

When AKRSP was initiated there was an institutional gap in the NAC as a result of the abolishment of the princely states and the unwillingness of the Pakistani government to invest in political institutions in a disputed area. AKRSP was a large, influential and resource-rich organization that was able to negotiate with the relatively weak political and religious leadership in the areas to get their support. Particularly in Ismaili¹²-dominated areas, such as Hunza and Upper Chitral, AKRSP was very successful. In other areas, where resistance was encountered by religious leaders, AKRSP was able to toned-down its Ismaili identity such that development activities could nevertheless be implemented.

3.2.2. Internal factors related to AKRSP policy and approach

Flexibility. There was flexibility in program management, decentralized power of decision making, which led to quick and effective implementation. There were effective planning exercises, starting at the village level up to the regional level, mainly done through a series of village, valley, regional and program level conferences and workshops. Each AKRSP field office would make their own plans in consultation with the villages. These plans were then consolidated and fed into each section at the regional level. Then the sections would make regional plans in consultation with the regional management team. This planning was

¹² Ismailia is a Muslim sect, whose spiritual leader is His Highness the Prince Karim Aga Khan. Prince Karim Aga Khan is also head of the Aga Khan Foundation, which is the parent organization of all Aga Khan Development Network organizations, including AKRSP.

subsequently sent to the core office. This was followed by feedback from the core office, advising on where activities may need adjustment. Once the budgets were approved, there was still room for adjustments at the section level as needed with changing needs and demands at the village level. This allowed for a quick response to changes in policy and direction. Management was decentralized to the sectoral level, limiting bureaucracy for making decisions on the ground. There were, however, strict financial and management auditing, both internally and externally, in addition to monitoring by a Joint Monitoring Mission of all of the donors supporting AKRSP.

Importance of leadership. In the early days of AKRSP, both the community and the staff trusted the leadership, it was transparent to both groups, with open communication between all actors, and at the same time able to earn the respect of staff and communities such that they did not take advantage of the open communication to criticize without good reason or resort to favoritism. By choosing such an open leadership style and having close contact with the communities, communities and individual staff members felt both empowered and obliged to give their best. Also, the skills developed by the villagers in expressing their views to leadership have proven to be useful to them in other fora, where they dare to speak out despite their remote origins. Also, the leadership knew the community members well, which became obvious in gatherings with other organizations where the AKRSP leadership often knew the village representatives by name. The charismatic quality of leadership, however, overshadowed the apparent lack of a good system of administrative and personnel management. As external funding was decreasing, the need for downsizing became suddenly very apparent, a situation for which there was no adequate policy or personnel system. The new leadership began downsizing as best they could, within the weak system they inherited. This resulted in downsizing in a relatively haphazard way, creating mistrust and insecurity among the staff, and leaving the field open for vested interests and favoritism despite the best intentions of the new leadership. This was the start of a longer-term reorganization of AKRSP's administration and management, which included a decentralization of power to the regions. In this process, the openness and flexibility both in communication and management which in the past contributed to the motivation of particularly staff was adversely affected, despite the good intentions of the new leadership. In the new systems that were evolving, the development of shared visions through regular and open communication between villagers, staff and leadership became more difficult, and there was an overemphasis on economic efficiency, and less on participatory processes.

Support to staff. Staff were well-paid and well-supported both administratively and logistically, and there was an active program for providing educational opportunities. There was also an emphasis on trying to break through the culture of hierarchy, and employees at all levels were considered as equal. This also meant that the leadership was very familiar with the situation in the field, visiting the communities frequently and knowing personally many of the villagers.

Processes of learning from experience. Some of the most important fora for learning from experiences in AKRSP have been the monthly and quarterly review sessions. In the monthly sessions, AKRSP staff would gather to discuss progress, problems and accountability of both field staff and technical staff. The main issues debated in these fora were mainly miscommunications, weaknesses of the packages offered and suggested improvements from the community. In these sessions, the monthly field diaries written by the field staff were discussed and cross-checked with the experiences from the technical staff who have also visited the field. These field diaries were an important documentation of field activities, to the extent that newly recruited staff were required to read through them at the onset of their employment to acquaint themselves with the organization and ‘de-educate’ themselves from a theoretical understanding of development to a field-based understanding. The field diaries were also a good source of accountability, allowing management to cross-check directly with the community.

Quarterly review workshops were organized jointly for AKRSP management, field and technical staff and community representatives. This was an open workshop where communities could express their opinions about the weaknesses and strengths of the activities and possible areas of improvement. In these workshops AKRSP staff were exposed to criticism from the community representatives, such that management could get a first hand view of how the community experienced AKRSP staff and their activities. In some cases this could be different than what the management was reporting through AKRSP’s internal reporting system. For these meetings, AKRSP was able to create an atmosphere where villagers felt free to openly express their views, something which was important in AKRSP’s philosophy of meeting the communities as equal partners. Each sectoral head would describe the field activities, the successes and difficulties encountered and future plans, and then had to

answer questions both by the communities and the AKRSP management. In this way, AKRSP staff were held accountable to the communities and AKRSP management.

4. NRM AND BIODIVERSITY: HOW SUSTAINABLE ARE THEY?

One of the central questions posed by development interests is whether NRM and biodiversity conservation projects can generate enough revenues and other non-monetary benefits (quality of life, cultural values, empowerment, etc.) for local people to be able to sustain those efforts without outside support. To address this question, it is important to realize that NRM and biodiversity activities can be rather diverse. They offer different types of benefits and require different incentive systems depending on the resources and the context in which they are managed. Also, whether communities are able to sustain these types of activities is not only a matter of supporting the communities with, for example, economic incentives. There are many institutional barriers which have to be understood and addressed to being able to manage these resources successfully, and the time and efforts required for these processes will again depend on the context. There are usually many actors involved in resource management, and sorting out who is responsible for what can be a complex process in itself.

The establishment of plantations in the NAC, for example, can be considered as an intervention which improved biodiversity (soil, vegetation, wildlife) and at the same time they are sustainable without outside support after their initial establishment. They are profitable, lead to empowerment through people making their own decisions over their resources, improve the quality of life through, for example, less labor needed for wood collection. Also, villagers no longer have to burn cow dung for fuel and instead use it for improving soil fertility in their fields, and they can even increase wood consumption to improve their quality of life through more heating.

AKRSP is also, however, closely involved in helping communities manage their natural forests and wildlife. Through this work it has become clear that there is a difference between the process of empowering communities for forest plantations which are under their direct control and management, and the processes of empowering communities for other resources that are under the control of the government. However, in AKRSP's experience, the process of empowering the communities in raising plantations has helped in both motivating the

communities and making them an equal partner in managing the resources which are officially under government control. AKRSP has been supporting community-based resource management conservation mainly through linking the communities (local conservation committees) with international actors (including IUCN, WWF). The government forestry department (FD), through their experience with working with AKRSP and communities in plantation establishment, are now accepting the community's role as partners in the management of natural resources, i.e. forests and wildlife. For example, the communities are now members of a District Conservation Committee with representation from district administration, FD, IUCN, and AKRSP. This committee, while not a formal decision-making body, provides a forum for the discussion of issues and drafting of suggestions which can be fed into policy at higher levels by each of its members.

This process has enabled the local communities to manage certain local resources, i.e. wildlife, which were considered solely government property. Because government did not have the technical and monitoring capacity, or the motivation to manage wildlife resources, and the communities were not permitted to interfere in management, the wildlife resources were over-exploited and reduced almost to extinction by local communities, officials and outsiders. Through the process of discussions between stakeholders, the policy was amended to allow communities to be a partner in wildlife management, and share in the revenues which could be generated through, for example, trophy hunting. The trophy hunting experience has been quite positive in many valleys including Chalt and Basho. Over the last 10 years, those wildlife species that bring revenue have been increased, and the communities are able to use this money for development activities. So far in the Northern Area, 25 ibex have been hunted under the trophy-hunting program (Gloekler, 2003). With each hunt generating a total of USD 5,000-25,000 per animal, and with 70% of the revenue remaining with the communities, this represents a significant amount of resources for each village, where per capita income is low. The income from trophy hunting is shared by the government and the communities; 20% and 80% respectively. The communities either deposit their entire share into a conservation fund or at least 30% of it. The remaining 50% is distributed equally among individual households. In some areas groups of households have started businesses (mostly shops in the village) using their share of the trophy hunting money. The money from the conservation fund is used by the communities for conservation and development activities, for example, for construction of link roads, health facilities (dispensaries) and schools. Annual wildlife surveys by the communities in their conservation area, payments to the village wildlife guards and

travel of the village representatives to the district headquarters to attend meetings related to conservation and trophy hunting is also paid from the conservation fund.

In the case of wildlife, high returns were possible within a relatively short time, with the only investment being in organization and local control and monitoring. Also, restricting wildlife hunting does not make a big difference for the local people, since there are only a few hunters involved. Forest resources, however, play a very central role in peoples' livelihoods. This makes the desire for conservation of forest resources high, but it is difficult to achieve in practice for many reasons. Firstly, village people are highly dependent on the forest for fuelwood and timber. It is not possible to restrict local use unless there are alternative sources of these resources. Secondly, returns from conservation of the forest take a relatively long time to realize, especially in these high-altitude regions. This makes it difficult to design and implement successful forest management plans with communities, and is therefore an area which has been given little attention in policy discussions between conservation organizations and the government. While most of the organizations claim an integrated habitat improvement approach for biodiversity conservation on paper, they in fact mainly deal with wildlife. In dealing with forest resources, however, we need a different approach. The process as a whole requires much more time and effort, since it involves understanding complex economic, technical, and social power relations before being able to argue for policy change to empower the community and develop a management plan. Returns may not be apparent in the immediate future. Therefore, AKRSP's integrated approach which promotes long-term institutional development is more appropriate for dealing with these issues. Through our recent work in forest management in Basho valley, we have learned that AKRSP's long-term investment in institutional development in connection with channel construction and forest plantations has played a pivotal role in enabling the community to initiate discussions on how to manage the natural forest on a sustainable basis. These are discussions which have been avoided by all actors in the past because of their complexity. These discussions are now at the point where concrete solutions are being suggested by the community, and these are being discussed at the policy level by government stakeholders. Whereas in the past conservation initiatives have come from either the government or NGOs, they are now coming from the communities, which makes it easier for policymakers to make decisions which are more realistic and appropriate to the communities. The community is also now able to see the role of forest plantations in providing fuelwood and timber resources, and is discovering the value of conserving the forest for other purposes, i.e. tourism, not only

for trophy hunting, but for its scenic beauty and potential as a trekking area. The community also has the confidence to demand assistance in dealing with those powerful interests still attempting to exploit the forest, both within and outside the valley.

5. DEVELOPING LOCAL INSTITUTIONS: THE INHERENT ROLE OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The development of local institutions such as VOs and WOs, and more recently the valley organizations, has been one of the core principles of AKRSP's approach. These organizations were to function according to democratic principles, which would ensure that development issues were discussed in a constructive way, such that major conflicts were either easily solved, or avoided altogether. While they had a common structure from the beginning which was to facilitate this process (with leaders, secretaries, committees, regular meetings etc.), the practice of democracy at the local level (how the decision-making process is promoted, designed and managed and by whom) varied significantly. Nevertheless, they all seem to face a similar challenge: that conflicts over resources are both more common and often more complex than anticipated. These conflicts reflect power relations both within villages and between villagers and 'outsiders', including AKRSP, the government and other interests. Dealing with these conflicts was found to be difficult, and requires specific skills in negotiation and conflict management, not only locally, but at higher levels as well.

For AKRSP, the realization that conflict is inherent in all communities represented a turning point in its understanding of community resource management. The approach AKRSP took initially was to only establish collaboration in those communities that were able to create an apparent consensus on wanting to collaborate. Therefore, only the communities able to do this were included in activities; AKRSP's strategy was to avoid conflict. Also, if conflict arose in a VO, AKRSP did not deal with it directly – it was up to the VO to solve the conflicts. Only recently has conflict management become an issue, but AKRSP is still reluctant to become directly involved in conflict resolution. The government is instead expected to play a role here. However, in an area where there is little transparency and a history of corruption in government institutions, AKRSP may be the best option to assist the villagers. Thus, it may be better for AKRSP to be engaged as an actor in conflict to avoid or manage it, instead of being dragged into it. Because of AKRSP's avoidance of conflict,

deeper, long-term conflicts actually developed in some communities, which are very difficult to solve at such a late stage.

In this section we look more closely at two cases which illustrate some of the challenges AKRSP has faced in practice when promoting what they claim is a more democratically-based institutional development. The first case provides an example of how conflict is inherent in most of the land development activities promoted by AKRSP, and how that has consequences for AKRSP's understanding of institutions, resources and its own role in conflict management. The second case focuses on common property management, and how AKRSP is now playing a role of active facilitator, where they see conflict and conflict management as an integral part of addressing rural development. The two cases together show the importance of acknowledging the inevitability of conflict over resources, and finding appropriate ways of managing this conflict through the involvement of local, governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Case 1. Biansa plantation

Biansa is situated about 6 km south of Skardu town. A 35 hectare plantation was developed here by the VO for its 38 households over the period 1985-1993. In the beginning, only a few hundred plants were planted, and because of high grazing pressure from the animals owned by nearby villages all the plants were damaged. Therefore the people of Biansa fenced the entire area in 1986 with a loan from AKRSP. A total of 90,000 plants have so far been planted, half of which were supplied by AKRSP while the community arranged the rest. AKRSP also provided 300 kgs alfalfa seed. In addition AKRSP also provided \$ 1700 for terracing and land development. The land is a stoney area with little soil, therefore people transported additional soil from long distances on tractors for filling the pits made for planting. Despite heavy investment by the community, the Biansa plantation has suffered heavy losses due to the difficult growing conditions.

In addition to the 35 hectare plantation area developed by Biansa, there are hundreds of hectares of barren land available for further development is the same area. All this land including the plantation area was used for free grazing by three clusters of villages (Biansa, Ghayul, Shigari Bala) in the past without any major dispute despite each cluster claiming rights to graze certain parts of the area. This is due to the fact that the area is extremely marginal with low grazing value where animals are left to pick fallen leaves of the few scattered trees during the autumn. The conflicts became more apparent when AKRSP supported the Biansa cluster to develop the plantation. The Biansa VO established their plantation on the piece of land they thought was their common property. The people from the Ghayul cluster objected, however, and claimed their rights to it. The people of Biansa asked the revenue department to demarcate the land. As a result, the land was divided into three pieces among the three clusters. After this settlement the people of Biansa started developing their plantation further by planting more trees. But this time the people of Shigari Bala objected to the land development by Biansa. The revenue department and the influentials of

the area intervened and divided that land according to the number of households in each cluster. The people of Biansa fenced the land while the people of Shigari Bala were not able to make a communal arrangement for the development of their piece of land.

Soon the piece of land owned by Biansa became productive and stood out compared to the rest of the barren land around it owned by Shigari Bala and Ghayul. However, since the communities share the water source during the summer, the people of Ghayul complained that the people of Biansa were using more water for irrigation, creating another dispute. The issue was taken to court. The elders intervened again and decided the case in favor of the people of Biansa. However, the people of Ghayul did not accept the decision. Being more in numbers, they damaged the irrigation channel leaving the plantation dry for a year.

In the meantime, Shigari Bala and Ghayul succeeded in gaining support from a few households of Biansa village. These were mainly the defaulters of the VO credit program, who had an interest in not returning the credit they had received from AKRSP, through the VO in Biansa. With the new association and strength the opponents of Biansa damaged the channel and the fence around the plantation. They also attacked a few members of Biansa. The issue was again taken to the court by the people of Biansa. In the past, decisions were made in favor of Biansa in all fora where this dispute was taken up. However, the government in this case has not been able to make a decision and defend it. Because of this failure of the government to make the property rights issue clear, the communities of the area are engaged in a never-ending conflict. The case is still in court.

There are many similar cases of disputes throughout Baltistan. The communities have been free to develop land without any formal permission from the government, thus many of the AKRSP-sponsored block plantations have been established in such land. In many of the areas there were no overt disputes between villages about who had the rights to develop the land; however, in other cases there were conflicts. In some cases these conflicts have been severe and the government has not been able to clarify the use rights, even though the cases have been in the courts for years. Ideally, these cases should not even go to the courts since the revenue department has the ownership and use-rights records. However, the government institutions are weak and often take sides where they should be an impartial conflict manager. In the absence of clear evidence on ownership or rights the cases can drag on for years. The courts also encourage the parties to take the cases to other, more informal decision-making fora at the village level (group of elders, religious leaders) where decisions could be made outside of the formal legal system based on knowledge of the local situation. The decisions made in these local fora, however, are not legally binding, so they can easily be challenged at a later date by one of the parties.

5.1. AKRSP'S INVOLVEMENT IN CONFLICTS AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Given AKRSP's intense and long-term engagement with the communities, and its influence over the administration, one of AKRSP's potential successes could be its ability to mediate disputes within and between communities, and between the government and the communities. AKRSP as an organization should be involved in conflict management since conflict is likely to arise in any development endeavor, and especially if the conflict is within or between VOs, which are organizations created with AKRSP support. AKRSP has been involved in the

creation of all three of the VOs in this area. Activities supported by ARKSP have included not only the land development activities directly, but also credit and other social development activities. AKRSP as an organization has tried to keep out of larger disputes which have arisen in this area, as a part of its overall policy to avoid becoming involved in serious conflicts. However, this has not been possible, as the disputes in this case have been closely tied to all of AKRSP-supported activities. Thus, rather than dealing with disputes as they arose, or as a regular part of the development activities in the area, AKRSP was dragged into them rather unwillingly, putting itself in a position where it is viewed as a party to a particular side of the conflict. In fact, sometimes it is a party. AKRSP as an organization is made up of individual staff, often from the very communities where conflict is occurring. While this can have a positive influence on development activities in that local issues can be more easily understood and a good local rapport with the community can be developed, there are also some dangers involved. If, for example, staff are so local that they are involved personally in local politics and disputes, conflicts of interest can appear. This has been the case in these disputes. Individual, local AKRSP staff became involved in several sides of the conflicts unofficially, in the course of executing their regular AKRSP activities. This makes it difficult for AKRSP at this point to change its role and act as a conflict manager. If the organization is to take seriously its responsibility of dealing with emerging conflicts in its project areas, better mechanisms within the organization have to be in place to ensure that special interests, whether it be those of staff or influential community members, are not favored. In organizations with local staff, it is thus extremely important to instill a principle of 'conflict of interest', where local staff withdraw themselves from becoming involved in issues where they themselves may benefit or be somehow biased. These interests are not confined to the individual level; the organization itself is often subject to the workings of local politics and has to have mechanisms with which it can operate with relative impartiality. These issues must be addressed at the policy level in AKRSP; they cannot be left to be worked out in an *ad hoc* manner. The mechanisms have to be transparent and predictable. In organizations where staff are unable to easily detach themselves from disputes it is important that the organization makes clear policies which require accountability through quick and clear decision making.

Case 2. Basho

More recently, AKRSP has begun to take a more active role in supporting the communities in taking charge of their communal natural resources, which can be seen in the case of forest resources in Basho Valley. Basho distinguishes itself from most of the other valleys in Baltistan in that it has a relatively large natural forest area, which results in the emergence of

different and more complex NRM issues than in other valleys. The intentions with the forest plantation activities, for example, were not only to provide necessary firewood, timber and fodder, but also to reduce the pressure on the natural forests and pastures. In Basho, however, this cannot be achieved unless attention is paid to the particular history of forest use in Basho. The natural forest of Basho has been exploited in the past for sale by the government, as well as by the timber mafia supported by government officials. This has reduced the forest cover drastically, endangering the livelihood of the local population (Ali and Benjaminsen, 2004). Thus, powerful interests have always been involved, and the local communities, despite their interest in protecting the forest, have not been able to prevent exploitation by outsiders and powerful community members.

To help remedy this situation, AKRSP has taken the lead in facilitating the process of negotiation by creating fora where these issues can be brought up openly, making it more and more difficult for powerful, corrupt interests to continue to take wood (Ali, et. al. 2004). Because of this discussion, the entire property rights issue comes to the fore. The local people have begun to discuss amongst themselves, and with the government, who has the rights to the forest products. The government has to listen and discuss local rights. This process becomes even more complex considering that local rights are anything but clear or fixed – rather they can be flexible depending on the context, with access rights being renegotiated in the face of, for example, environmental or economic change (Nyborg, 2002). This is not resolved, but the real lesson is that these discussions are taking place and the villagers dare to take these issues up at all. They discuss for example who has the right based on need, rather than allowing those earning a lot to keep control (Ali, et. al. 2004). Also, it is important to realize that if this entire negotiation process is not guided well, the danger is that nothing is resolved, and it can lead to more exploitation, with different interests claiming what they say is theirs, with no common goals or sense of community interest in resource management. Thus, these activities represent a clear shift in AKRSP's approach to one of passive, resource provider, to one of proactive engagement in discussions and negotiations.

5.2. TRENDS IN PARTICIPATION

The impact from the forestry and other NRM activities is broad-based, community-wide, and poverty-focused. These activities are organized through VOs which are based on democratic principles with participation from at least 60% of the community. The V/WOs were encouraged to meet every few weeks, with a social organizer from AKRSP present once a month. There has, however, been a move within AKRSP away from working exclusively with VOs, to working with other groups and individuals, often termed entrepreneurial development and institutional diversity (Wood and Shakil, 2003). Such a strategy is important in order to capture new opportunities for expanding the impact of AKRSP development activities. There is a danger, however, in focusing too much on supporting individual-based activities and activities of special-interest groups if it is at the expense of broad-based community development. Through an intensified focus on supporting individuals and locating other organizations with which to collaborate, the VOs as institutions have unfortunately been

relatively ignored. Because NRM activities were a major part of AKRSP's program when the VO's were being established, it has been assumed by many that VOs could not be engaged in activities other than NRM activities. While the activities the VOs were engaged in at the start were NRM-based, the VOs have never been exclusively formed for NRM activities; it was always the intention that they develop into village development organizations capable of implementing any activity relevant to the community. That there are conflict and power struggles connected to the functioning of VOs, rendering some of them seemingly dysfunctional, engagement should not necessarily be avoided, but attempts could be made to understand the conflicts in terms of who the different actors are and what their interests are. A minimum of 60% of the village households had to be members of the VO. Who then does not become a member? Do we know? Different power bases or the poor? This would make a big difference in terms of AKRSP policy. If the poor are not included, then it could be true that the types of activities would be based on the interests of the better off and the poor would need another type of intervention or possibly organization. But it could also be the better off who did not want to participate, as they may feel they can improve their situation more effectively on their own. Also, as the region moves closer to developing more formalized democratic governance systems, the need for strong civil society organizations which can promote the interests of their members becomes an important part of the political landscape.

One argument for lessening the focus on the VOs and moving towards institutional diversification has been that the interests of some of the people in the village are being left out of VO activities – particularly the poor and destitute (Wood and Shakil, 2003), thus favoring the better-off. Once newly developed land has been distributed, for example, the question arises whether the poor can develop that land. Institutional diversity for dealing with the poor and destitute has thus been promoted. The focus of these activities with alternative institutions has been twofold. First, social development i.e. health and education has been promoted. These, however, are also community-wide activities, which might have been implemented within the V/WO if they had been interested and encouraged, and do not solve the problem of NRM activities being biased in favor of the better off. In fact, there have been several attempts at focusing on the needs of the poor both early in the program, as well as through a poverty program where NRM activities are a central part. This is where the linkage between NRM and poverty has continued within the organization, although it is not so visible. Also, since women are still heavily involved in NRM activities in the rural areas, a focus on these activities is in the interest of particularly rural women. Also, their involvement

increases when men leave the area for employment and they are left with even more responsibility for NRM. The participation of women in activities initiated through WOs (basically NRM activities) has had an important impact on women's ability to participate in decision-making in development (Gloekler and Seeley, 2003). Also, a focus on institutions which do not have such a wide base of support risks supporting special interest groups. This may be good if these represent disadvantaged groups previously left out of development. But it could also lead again to exclusion of, for example, the poor. At least the VO guaranteed 60% of the population, but working with other organizations AKRSP cannot guarantee how many will be included. Also, in taking such an approach, AKRSP may not be able to secure broad-based support in the communities as in the past, but will have to become even more engaged in negotiating with different community interests. Again, it is the difference of entering into such a situation with open eyes rather than finding yourself pulled into a situation for which you were unprepared.

Another major thrust of AKRSP's recent program has been entrepreneurial activities, which rather than focusing on the poor and destitute have given opportunities to enterprising individuals, usually in non-farm based activities. This kind of activity can serve to promote the development of the broader economy in that it can create employment and contribute to market development, but it does not contribute to other development goals such as democratic participation and improvements in livelihood security for the poorest. Also, unless a lot of effort is made to design programs to cater to the special needs of women entrepreneurs in an area where women are in effect excluded from direct participation in the main bazaars, such a program would be inherently male-biased. In other words, following policies of entrepreneurial development are valid and important aspects of development, but they cannot replace other types of activities which are more broad-based, poverty and women-focused; often located within the NRM arena.

The issue of democratic institutions, however, comes under a new light both as communities become more differentiated (Wood and Malik, 2003) and as AKRSP changes its village level strategy towards one of institutional diversity. While it is important to support institutions other than VOs which may be emerging at the village and valley levels, it is also important to consider the degree to which activities both have broader based support within the community, and manage to have an impact on those in the community who are most in need of support. In the past, for example, the whole community was involved in the establishment

of plantations, and thus everyone in the village benefited. Working with narrower institutions, however, AKRSP must be careful to examine which interests are in fact being served, and acknowledge the fact that smaller organizations will not have the same representativeness that a village-wide organization would have. Also, as long as everyone in the village was involved in the planting of new plantations (and grazing restrictions) in a communal management situation, there were few access conflicts. However, if individuals or limited groups try to establish plantations and restrict grazing access to others then this would create conflict, and the benefits would not be as great. The issue of participation and community development becomes more complex in such a multi-institutional environment, and needs increasing attention by organizations such as AKRSP.

The WOs offered a way in which women could begin to be included in decisions made in formal fora. Since AKRSP changed its approach to one where the staff is less often in the field, and organizations are encouraged to come to them in their offices in town for support, decisions on development are increasingly being made in formal fora, more distant from the household and women's influence. This could alienate most women's participation in decision making with the exception of those few who have received training and are therefore more mobile than the rest.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

In light of the myriad of choices available in how to organize and implement development activities, using NRM activities as a focal point for rural development has proven a successful choice by AKRSP. Its impact in the NAC has been both broad and lasting, contributing significantly to income increases, improved resource management, and community development. It has also served as a model for the creation of other like-minded organizations in both Pakistan and elsewhere in the region. Learning from these experiences may seem an easy task. However, what we learn really depends on how we analyze, and how we analyze depends on our assumptions about, for example, how people interact both with each other and with their environment, and how we think development activities will influence these relationships, as well as how well we understand the particular context within which we work. There are therefore many different opinions on why and in what ways AKRSP has been successful, as well as why in some cases they have not. This is particularly important when

discussing strategy, as it will determine what activities will be strengthened and promoted, and what will be cast aside. Throughout this paper, we have tried not only to analyze the activities and outcomes, but also to dig deeper into the assumptions behind them. While there have been earlier studies and evaluations examining the impact of AKRSP's NRM activities on income, or the environment, none have looked particularly at the nexus of nature, wealth and power, and how a better understanding of these issues might give insight into how these activities contribute to broader development goals. From our analysis we would like to highlight the following points, which we consider key lessons learned from AKRSP's NRM work.

Long-term engagement in the community

Some might argue that long-term and intense engagement with communities creates dependency and raises expectations. Instead, they promote shorter, intensive investment and engagements with the communities, based on the assumption that the community itself will manage best on its own. Such approaches underestimate the complexity of local social and political relations, however, and risk becoming an example of development tourism where the development workers and organizations remain distant from the realities of life in the rural communities. Experience from Basho, however, confirms what we learn from the overall approach of AKRSP in terms of long-term engagement in an area. The duration and nature of engagement with the communities is probably more important than the level of activities, in that it allows for more community members to participate in more discussions around evolving issues, leading to a more democratic process, and less danger of resources falling into the hands of elite, who are likely those most active at the start.

Mechanisms to ensure transparency

In order to ensure transparency such that the community will have confidence in emerging institutions, AKRSP has used several mechanisms. First, AKRSP required the participation of a majority in the village, at least a minimum of 60% to ensure representativeness. Also, planning and implementation of the project took place in an open forum, where any of the villagers could either participate or at least check the process. Though one can create many different procedures, it is very important that most activities are done in front of the villagers, particularly the announcing and disbursement of any project resources or money. In AKRSP's case, three committees were formed in each village: implementation committee, audit committee, maintenance committee. Thus one of the functions of the VO was to create a

transparent system. The committees are made from different 'groups' because they are chosen openly, giving them less chance for corruption. This can only happen, however, if there is an open environment, where people feel free to express themselves. AKRSP, with its open and participatory spirit, encouraged people to talk, and thus gave voice to more than just the village leadership.

Focus on locally-based, community-wide NRM activities

AKRSP's experience has shown that by basing activities in the rural communities where particularly poorer women and men still base their livelihoods on different forms of resource management, the potential for the development of democratic institutions and the equitable distribution of benefits is high. By shifting focus, however, to individual enterprises in urban centers, and lessening AKRSP presence in the communities by requiring organizations to seek them out in their city offices, women and the poor, who continue to be based in the rural communities, are left out of the process, and the fostering of community awareness and activism is weakened. These should be complementary approaches, as they achieve different goals, and cannot replace each other.

Inclusion of women in decision-making

In an area where women find it difficult and are often not permitted to participate in decision-making in emerging, formalized institutions, the organization of women in WOs has proven an important strategy to develop their skills and confidence in discussing and expressing and interacting in more formal forums. This has become particularly visible in recent years, where one sees that it is mainly women who have been active in WOs who are contesting local elections.

Managing conflict and negotiations over resources

Land development, whether it involves land which was previously communally grazed or unused, can result in disputes over land rights. In most cases these disputes are better resolved by traditional institutions than formal institutions. However, if the traditional institutions are not able to resolve these disputes, the role of government institutions becomes crucial. However, these institutions may not be competent or willing to clarify or make decisions on land rights. In such situations, the development organization has both a role and a responsibility to mediate. AKRSP has learned through its experiences in NRM that as an organization, it must take an active role in understanding and mediating resource conflicts, as

through its engagement in the village is itself an actor. This poses challenges both in how to manage mediation without ‘taking sides’, and linking with the relevant government officials when their expertise or impartiality is required.

The emergence of a stronger civil society and democratic institutions

We have also seen that different resources pose different challenges in their management, and that it is not merely a matter of economic returns that is the decisive factor in motivating the community to, for example, sustainably use their forests. The majority of the community can be both environmentally aware and motivated to change their management practices; however, their efforts may be thwarted by powerful interests, both within and outside the village. AKRSP has learned it can play an important role in facilitating discussions between the various actors with interest in the forest resources, supporting in particular the efforts of the local communities by giving them a voice and holding powerful interests accountable for their decisions and actions. From our research, it is clear that the ability of communities to organize and take an active stance in claiming their rights over common natural resources is directly related to their earlier experiences of organizing themselves in the context of other types of NRM activities through V/WOs. The emphasis in V/WOs on community-wide participation and representation, transparency, and activism has had a strong influence on how newer institutions have been formed. In the end, it is the capacity to organize, negotiate and advocate that will likely prove increasingly valuable, as civil society plays an ever more active role in the development of formal democratic institutions in the region.

Finally, the question arises of whether, or to what degree, the experiences of AKRSP can be replicated, either in other areas in Pakistan, or elsewhere in the region. Here it would depend both on what one defines as successful and what one means by replication. There is ample evidence from the last 30 years of development activities that a ‘blueprint’ approach is not effective, mainly due to the lack of attention to context. Therefore, merely setting up a project as a ‘replica’ of AKRSP would not, in our opinion, be wise. This was, in fact attempted by several organizations in Pakistan¹³. They were established using AKRSP as a model, although it became clear after some time that because of their different political, social, economic and cultural contexts they had to adjust, in some areas drastically, their approach. Many AKRSP staff were recruited into these programs. However, rather than re-analyzing their new situation, the emphasis was on implementing exactly what was implemented in the

¹³ For example, National Rural Support Program (NRSP), Punjab Rural Support Program (PRSP) etc.

NAC, which did not work as planned. This was because AKRSP was designed in a specific context (i.e. isolated, resource-poor, relatively socially and economically homogenous) and it was in fact AKRSP's responsiveness to this context which is one of its strengths. This does not mean that we cannot learn from AKRSP's experiences, and use these lessons elsewhere. It does mean, however, that the kinds of lessons will be different, with more of an emphasis on principles rather than activities, and their successful combination. This also requires a different kind of competence on the part of development agents, particularly at the local level, such as the ability to analyze NRM activities in their particular context, rather than merely implement a set of activities proven effective elsewhere. In our view, it should be possible for these agents to learn about AKRSP's experiences, and analyze them for themselves to see in what ways these successes can be translated into viable, sustainable development activities in their own areas.

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