
	Pamir High Mountains Integrated Project Bulletin 16. 4\04. Republic of Tajikistan GBAO		
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Monthly issue			

PHIP is an integrated development project implemented by the INGO ACTED. It is funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and UNESCO. It started operating in 1999 and aims at improving the livelihood of the local population by opening up sustainable economic options. Support to civil society, capacity building, and support to vulnerable population are the focus of activities. The project is organized into departments responsible for “Agriculture, Environment and Livestock”, “Community Social Infrastructures”, “Social and Poverty Alleviation”, “Support to local handicraft”, “Credit and Capacity Building” and “Culture”. The latest program aims at developing structures for community based ecotourism.

Key events in April

- Exploratory mission of coal mining expert Gauthier Weber to assess the potential of known and recently discovered coal deposits in Kur Teke, Muzkol and Gudhara.
- Advisory Board and Steering Committee with participation of donors, government representatives and international organizations were held in Murghab at the end of April
- Participation in UNESCO workshop on ‘building sustainability into the Ecotourism project’ held in Buthan

Reports by departments

Based on the results of the village assessments, all departments detailed their plan of action 2004 and submitted it for advice and confirmation to the Advisory board and Steering Committee.

The Yak House

Following the interest expressed by women in different villages, first village handicraft groups were organized and initial training given in Kuna Kurgan, Madian and Bulun Kul – other villages are to follow. Sales in Murghab as well as in Khorog (Serena Inn) and in Dushanbe (Bactrian Centre, Marian Guesthouse) are going well and new items have been delivered to all successful sales outlets.

Culture

The village assessments showed the great demand for musical as well as sports inventory. The population has expressed its willingness to contribute towards the cost of purchasing the items. In most places, village organizations or jemoat culture branch will look after the items. PTAs have expressed their interest in the new schoolbook scheme (rental on a longer term basis) and are to submit book orders.

Micro Finance

ACTED Murghab loan officer participated in a Micro Finance workshop in Kurgan Tiube in order to further streamline ACTED Murghab Micro Finance Project (MFP) with ACTED Tajikistan MFP, as well as to discuss overall strategic changes (broadening of micro finance instruments to reach more vulnerable families as well as small enterprises, creation of an independent micro finance institution, etc).

First micro finance groups (“tontines” and “tontones”) were created in Murghab town. The result of these pilot groups instruments will show which micro finance scheme is most adapted to the geographical and economical peculiarities of Murghab rayon. These results will allow to further refine ACTED Murghab Micro Finance Project.



Agriculture

In all villages interested in participating in the agriculture program, groups were formed and initial trainings given. The agronomist went to Ishkashim to purchase potato seeds to complement the seed fund of last years harvest. Seeds will be distributed as grant for the new beneficiaries, with a view to popularize agriculture in Murghab district.

Two ploughs were bought to allow for an easier preparation of the fields and extend the arable land surface. A local craftsman will be asked to build some more to hand out to the groups working bigger plots.

After discussions with villagers, a distribution of the vaccines through the VOs is being considered. This will, though, request the approval of veterinary department.

Ecotourism

The program manager travelled to Bhutan to participate in the fourth of a series of UNESCO workshops supporting the program to develop Ecotourism in 8 countries of South and Central Asia. Focus of the workshop was 'sustainability', drawing on the past experiences and the results of the evaluations carried out in all projects. Bhutan was a very interesting place to visit – full of trees, which cannot be claimed for Murghab...

Small rehabilitations of the homestays to be ready for the reception of tourists have been agreed upon and are ongoing (bathrooms/toilets; energy efficiency rehabilitation, etc).

The awareness campaign for conservation and biodiversity planned for May had to be postponed as some of the participating scientists are not free. The work on the visual material (calendar, brochure) with a local artist moved forward and found a consensus with nature protection, representatives of the Ecotourism project and project coordination.

Rehabilitation

Very intensive interaction with mobilization department have led to agreements with the communities of Kuna Kurgan (medical point) and Shaimag (boarding school) on the plan of action, the budget as well as the kind of community contribution (in kind and in cash).

Other sites identified and prioritized will include: construction of an extra building for the school # 9 in Murghab as an 'energy efficient construction' demonstration worksite with the input of a Swiss consultant familiar with the project, medical point in Cheshtebe (rehabilitation of an existing building) and hospital in Alichur (rehabilitation). Small alterations will be made to the boarding school in Chechekty built last year in order to make it more energy efficient.

Agreements with local authorities and the involved communities are being sought for all worksites in order to ensure a sustainable use of the sites (staffing, furniture, equipment, maintenance, etc)

Support to Most Vulnerable Families

Given the end of Humanitarian aid, this program received some recommendations during the Advisory Board concerning changes in the goat breeding scheme.

The opening of "Tontine" and "Tontone" groups has offered micro finance perspective to support most vulnerable families.

Further programs will be harmonized with MSDSP in order to best address the growing need for a development oriented intervention.

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Advisory Board and Steering Committee

The PHIP's 2004 **advisory board** was held in Murghab on April 26th and 27th 2004. Representatives of SDC, of the province authorities, of the AKF and of MSDSP attended the two days meeting. Both last year' activities and the coming years activities and budget were presented and discussed, which allowed the participants to give their feedbacks on the strengths and weaknesses of the project. The main weaknesses of the project as identified by the participants were the following:

- Over stretching of the project: some participants advised the project to concentrate on a smaller number of activities whilst other participants believed that this broad approach was a



strength of the project, allowing it to answer to most of the problems faced by the district.

Note: This issue is of strategic importance for the project, and one that will be further discussed with the project's donors.

- Lack of interaction of the project with other development actors (authorities, other agencies, village organizations, etc).

Note: the project has endeavoured to strengthen its collaboration with other Murghab district development actors. This resulted in the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding with MSDSP during the advisory board. Building on this, the project will strive to further increase collaboration with its partners.

The advisory board also allowed to discuss the future development of Murghab district, with a focus on two of the most pressing issues:

- the lack of heating materials;
- the end of humanitarian aid distribution.

Several ideas were proposed by the meeting attendees to address these issues. Building on this first step, further meetings shall be held to follow up on these ideas.

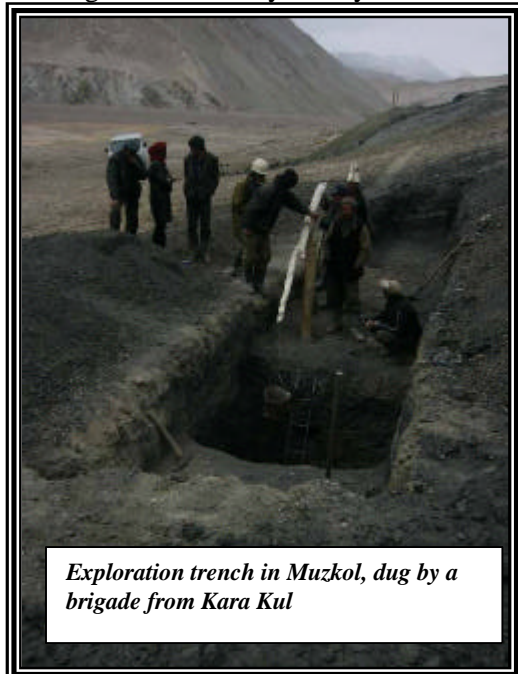
The PHIP's 2004 **steering committee** was held on April 28th in Murghab. Representatives of SDC, of the province and district authorities, as well as of ACTED Dushanbe attended the meeting. The outcomes of the advisory board were presented to the attendees of the steering committee and some issues discussed during the advisory board were further discussed (the lack of heating materials, the end of humanitarian aid, etc). The 2004 planned activities and budget were presented to the attendees and accepted.

Searching for fuel: the coal mission

The lack of heating material is one of the core problems for Murghabis. The only locally available fuel is a slow growing altitude-desert shrub- Teresken, which has been used to disappearance in a radius of over 40km around Murghab town, and dried Yak droppings, "Kizak". Last winter, MSDSP and ACTED were requested to supply the population of Murghab with subsidized coal. This kind of intervention cannot be repeated indefinitely, as it is not sustainable. In order to prepare a plan for the exploitation of local deposits, the PHIP has invited a French mining expert, Gauthier Weber.

Since the 10th of April, Mr Weber has visited the sites of Kur Teke and started an exploratory dig in two sites west of the Muzkol range (see Newsletter March 2004). The most promising place, Kyzyl Tokoi near Gudara in Bartang valley, was inaccessible due to road conditions, it is only in early may that the expert will be able to visit the site. His findings are so far not promising – a financial investment of any sort in the exploitation of Kurteke and Muzcol sites is not recommended. At best, local inhabitants can continue to dig and extract the few sacks of coal these deposits contain:

The exploratory mine opened in Kur Teke since Gauthier's first visit in 1997 was not promising: the coal is badly interlaced with non-combustible material, and this geological composition remains the



Exploration trench in Muzkol, dug by a brigade from Kara Kul



same from the entrance of the pit to its end, some 300 m horizontally into the hill. An exploitation of the site is not recommended.

The trenches and exploration holes dug in two locations of Muzkol have unfortunately shown the same mixture of coal and non-combustible materials. In a laboratory test, the coal extracted at 70 cm beneath the surface burned with 3100 Kcal/kg. A brigade dug a canal of 11 m long and 3½ m deep at its deepest place. Coal samples from different depths did not show any better result.

Gauthier then visited the open-pit mine run by a Chinese company in Saryk Mogul to get more familiar with the regional technical capacities. This site will be exploited to a depth of some 50m, when the slope of the pit will make a further extraction impossible. The diving seam has been traced some 400m beneath the surface, but for economical reasons the company opted for an open pit.

The expert has currently left to Gudara to examine the deposit and possibly design an extraction plan. The fuel situation of GBAO and Murghab in particular was greatly discussed during the Advisory Board and Steering Committee and all institutions and agencies present showed their commitment to find a solution - the coal mission is already a first step to trans-agency and -institution cooperation, hopefully to result in the provision of fuel to the population.

The Camels of Rang Kul – the ‘caravan project’ gaining shape

The population of Bactrian Camels, once of great importance to the Kyrgyz nomads of the Pamirs for transportation and mobility, has greatly suffered during Soviet times. They were substituted by trucks for transportation and as a result this symbol of nomadism is in the verge of extinction in Murghab district.

Rang Kul is the only place where a greater number of these camels are still kept. 16 of these majestic animals roam the deserted valleys near the Chinese border under the great white eyes of Mustagh Ata. Living there in half wilderness, they are only round up in September for carrying hay for winter forage. Yet, the little use people have for them nowadays does endanger their survival. The Murghab Ecotourism project has therefore approached the Rang Kul community to assess whether they would be interested in providing services to tourists with those camels. The vision ‘caravan’, where Bactrian camels carry visitors over mountain passes and to summer pastures, a probably unique experience, is now approaching reality:



Soon to carry visitors over breathtaking mountain passes?

Three itineraries ranging from 1 – 4 days on the back of the beasts have been identified, and prices per day have been fixed by the group of camel owners. Since the camels need 10 days of training (and thus feeding) before they can be confronted with visitors, the first day on camel back will seem rather expensive (60 US\$), whereas the following days will be charged with less than 20 US\$. The results of this year offer will serve for reconsidering prices or itineraries for the following development of such a scheme – and supposedly lead to a re-valorisation of the beautiful creature with the furry feet.

