



HIC - Dhana Valley Natural Preserve: Human Rights and Community Development

Dhana Valley Natural Preserve: Human Rights and Community Development

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1.- General description of the project

Geographic location: Jordan, al-Tufaila Governorate, Dhana and al-Qadisiyya villages.

Project starting date: late 1994.

Number of workers (permanent /volunteers): 5 permanent and 12 volunteers.

Targeted categories (current/targeted): community of Dhana and al Qadesia.

Number of individuals/families who benefited from the project (current/targeted): current 500 individuals / targeted 10,000 persons.

Geographic scope of the project (current/ targeted): Dhana and al-Qadisiyya region

2.- Socioeconomic conditions of the experience/initiative

Dhana region was first inhabited 3,000 years ago, yet the present built-up area dates back less than 500 years and is distinguished by the components of local stone, mud, wood, canes and shrubs. The village is the only vestige of the dominant style of building in most Jordanian villages until the end of the nineteenth century.

In 1989, the very first steps for the foundation of the Dhana Protectorate were taken by the Royal Association for the Protection of Nature, against the local inhabitants' apprehensions. All members and employees of the association were from the capital Amman, which is about 200 kms north of the village. Moreover, The association used manipulative and crooked methods to persuade the notables, village inhabitants the general public of the project's significance and its putative service to the local community.

In 1993, the establishment of the protectorate was officially declared. This, in turn, led to the centralized control of the region surrounding the village and, thus, curtailed the social and economic activities of the people, who relied mainly on the livestock breeding, agriculture and firewood gathering to meet their primary needs.

The people were marginalized by their low education levels, lack of practical expertise, legal culture and knowledge of relevant litigation. The local inhabitants' lacked any influence over decision makers, particularly in light of the authoritative nature of the Royal Association for the Protection of Nature (directed by Jordan's most prominent figures), with its experience, financial and media power. This enabled the Royal Association for the Protection of Nature to prepare, plan and market its program with disregard for the interests and needs of the local community, which seemed incapable of defending its rights or even realizing what is going on around them.

The foundation of Dhana Nature Preserve and the accompanying media and touristic propaganda urged some well off figures, investors and the Royal Association for the Protection of Nature to buy village lands at very low prices, taking advantage of the crushing poverty of the people there. This, in turn, incited the local community to join forces and unite in face of such lopsided competition and take the initiative to solve the problem and protect their rights.

The main problems that initiative aimed to solve are:

- The local community's weakness to defend its rights and face the challenges posed by the greed of the Royal Association for the Protection of Nature and private-sector investors.
- The spread of poverty and unemployment that turned the region into a target for the Royal Association for the Protection of Nature as well as investors

3.- Main and subsidiary objectives of the project/ the initiative

Main objectives of the initiative

The project/initiative was meant to empower the local community at Dhana and al-Qadisiyya to defend and



maintain their social, economic and customary rights and to link their various livelihood needs, on one hand, with the efforts of development and environmental, on the other. This sought to preserve the region and combat urban poverty and unemployment, all with the aim of improving living conditions of the people and the region on the social, economic, environmental and developmental levels.

The project/initiative also aimed at carrying out a comprehensive development process for the Dhana and al-Qadisiyya region, making financial and social profits for the people of the region as well as for the state.

Secondary objectives of the initiative

The project/initiative aimed as well to attain some ancillary objectives, including: to improve of the people's living conditions; encourage and assist children to attend school; encourage and assist the youth to continue their studies through university; to provide vocational training to the youth, in order to qualify them for employment in the market; and to assist youth by employing them in the association activities.

The project/initiative also aimed to preserve natural and cultural heritage of the region, to make use of those resources to maintain their sustainability, as well as develop environmental tourism to empower and develop the society. Other objectives included motivating collective action in the local community to enable it to face the unequal competition with foreign investments, developing the association's potential and empowering it to continue its role and prepare for the present and future challenges.

4.- Source and participating parties of the initiative:

Source of the initiative:

Ever since the beginning of the project, at the end of 1994, and until 2001, it depended on the total support of the local community in the initial studies, planning, implementation, follow up, assessment and development stages. Different sectors of the community, especially the youth, assumed a primary role. Women assumed a moderate role due to the traditions, customs and, particularly, their consequently weaker education level.

Participating parties:

The project was directed to serve all categories of the society, thanks to the strong social coherence of the people and to their realization that the concept of comprehensive development cannot be attained if any sector of the society or its needs were overlooked. The project started with interviewing the young people of the region, in order to explore their conditions, needs, potentials, opportunities and impediments.

Solutions were proposed, and the project reflected the priorities of the benefactors and their reaction to the prior marginalization of the people in the planning by the Royal Association for the Protection of Nature/Dhana Preserve. They also sought to confront private investments' intended absorption of local resources without sufficiently contributing to local development. A Jordanian cooperative institution (a governmental institution), the UNDP, Care International and the local popular committees took part in supporting and operating the people's project/initiative.

5.- Legal framework and management of the project

Legal framework:

It was agreed to form an organization represented in a cooperative association that was formed in the end of 1994: the Cooperative Association for the Sons of Dhana and al-Qadisiyya (ASDQ). The Jordanian cooperative institution, which is an autonomous governmental institution, played a prominent role in legitimizing the status of the ASDQ. It relied upon the application and implementation of all international laws, instruments and treaties related to human rights, in particular, housing rights, the protection of nature and sustainable preservation of natural resources. After the ASDQ's foundation, other bodies cooperated with the Association such as UNDP, Care International and the local popular committees.

Decision making and management of the project/ the initiative:

All segments of the community were represented in project decision making, including the youth (males and females), the elderly and all marginalized categories. The public authority or the administrative authority elected by the local community of Dhana took the formal decisions. The project was managed and implemented by a working staff represented in the administrative authority of the project/ the initiative.

6.- Strategic planning of the project/ the initiative



- Ways of including all parties in the planning of the project/ the initiative:
In the first stage, processes of the initiative, planning, funding and implementation took place on a local (popular) level. In the second stage, there were various parties participating in the planning, funding and implementation of some programs that needed financial or technical expertise, especially those aspects implying investment (governmental and nongovernmental organizations, international funding institutions, private sector, international agencies and local initiatives).
- Determination of the authentic needs of the targeted audience:
Through a number of activities that polled the local community of Dhana, needs and priorities were determined; activities were represented in the following:
 - Meetings between the region's youth and the different popular sectors to explore the economic, social and habitual conditions and status of the region.
 - Meetings between the region's youth and the different popular sectors for consultation, determination of needs, potentials, opportunities and impediments of the project/ initiative.
 - A workshop for youth in order to determine propositions and solution plans for the project.

7.- Resources of the project/ initiative (funding/capital)

Financial resources of the project:

The project resources are represented in financial, technical and human resources. The project started by total dependence on the village inhabitants to provide all resources (financial-technical and human). Yet due to the seriousness of the project coupled with the enthusiasm of the village's inhabitants, some donor international organizations supplied the project/the initiative with financial aid as follows:

In the first stage from 1994 to 2001, funding was local, represented mainly in the collection of simple monthly contributions from the people. Funding then took the form of borrowing to fund investment projects, in addition to the projects of the association that contributed by a fluctuating addition to the activities (the bus and the hotel).

In the second stage, from 2001 to the present, the UNDP contributed to funding the rehabilitation of the hotel, development of the association and training of the employees and volunteers. Arvel Travel Agency also contributed by a financial aid to support the association activities in 2004.

The ASDQ seeks to benefit from the productivity-enhancement projects undertaken by the Jordanian Ministry of Planning, in order to finance the implementation of development projects that focus on poverty and unemployment eradication, and seek to enhance the local communities' participation in national development.

Local resources and the potential social capital:

The Dhana Valley Project is one of the prominent projects that have a distinguished social capital from its beginning to the end. It presents a model for maintenance of human rights and a model as well that can be put forth in all international conferences, symposia and ceremonies. This is attributed to the fact that the project has been from the very beginning stimulated by the village inhabitants' sense of danger from changing their village to a natural protectorate, without their dependence on any governmental body or international organization. This prominent social role was the real motivator that incited donor international bodies to provide technical and financial support.

8.- Implementation of the project/ the initiative

Role of the local community, the state and other partners in the implementation of the project/ the initiative:

The Dhana Valley project implied all sorts of partnerships and participation of all governmental and nongovernmental organizations, international funding institutions, private sector, international agencies and local initiatives. However, the positive role assumed by the local community is the key to its success and sustainability. Groups of volunteering local young people worked as social researchers to study the socioeconomic and development conditions and characteristics of the region, as well as map out the potentials, needs, opportunities and impediments and they called for uniting of efforts. The village inhabitants took part in the restoration of old houses, as well as the restoration and building of the irrigation channels in development of orchards.

Different work committees were formed from the village inhabitants according to their needs. Young people voluntarily assisted on an individual and collective basis in planning, implementing and supervising the



creation of a social organization and the different development programs. The personal contacts of the different national and international groups and individuals helped facilitate and support the civil association activities. This proves that the primary role of planning and implementing the project was mainly assumed by the local community.

Impediments that faced the project/ the initiative and means of overcoming them:

Several impediments that hampered the initiative were overcome, including:

- A high degree of poverty and unemployment alleviation achieved by direct employment, efficiency enhancement, training and qualifying people; however, there is further need to double those efforts, because of the harsh economic conditions of the region and its location, remote from job opportunities.
- The weak authority of the community vis--vis the governmental departments was nonetheless overcome by the representative leaders of the community who address the government in order to reveal the needs and aspirations of the society and defend its rights.
- Low awareness of the rights and litigation procedures. However the awareness programs carried out by the association helped enhance the level of awareness of the local community about human rights, means of requesting and defending rights in a legal way.
- Typically fragmented individual efforts: yet the association helped create a collective organization that united the efforts and led them toward the attainment of the objectives and aspirations of the society.
- The low education level was faced by supporting the poor students, encouraging them and their parents to complete their education and making them aware of the role of education in improving their living conditions.
- The difficulty of transportation from and to the village; to face the problem, a small bus was allocated especially to serve the students and the route of transportation to and from Dhana.
- A lack of openness on the part of the community was overcome by means of transforming the village to a natural protectorate that can enhance tourist marketing of the village with the aim of transforming the community into an open one linked to the outside world.
- Deliberate marginalization of the village inhabitants by the Royal Association For the Protection of Nature was overcome by clarifying the significance of the local community developmental role in the region to the governmental and the funding authorities of the Royal Association for the Protection of Nature. Village inhabitants were, thus, able to exert pressure on the Royal Association to correct its behavior and help the community instead of competing with it.

Other obstacles were not overcome, including the following:

- Inability to market investment activities professionally, in order to obtain the capital needed to fund further activities.
- The local staff's weak relations with the funding bodies.
- Great reliance on temporary volunteers, which negatively influences the chances of building and developing the organization and its institutional experience, and limits the efficiency of the volunteers' participation in the training programs that seek to transfer and develop local expertise.

Fields that the project/ initiative serves:

The project serves a number of fields, including:

- Research and planning through continuing interviews and meetings to determine needs, demands as well as daily life problems and aspects;
- Capacity Building: training of local staff, organizing the community, making it aware of its legal rights and activation of the role of individual and collective initiatives in achieving the interests of the community;
- Improvement of housing conditions and construction of houses through participation of village inhabitants in the restoration of old houses;
- Social development in the built environment, confronting poverty, unemployment and enhancement of education level;
- Rural development by way of support for agriculture, livestock breeding, maintaining and restoring water channels, and enhancing agricultural and veterinary awareness;
- Education and training: encouraging and assisting youth to continue their studies and to join universities and training them in how to pursue job opportunities;
- Social mobilization and motivation of the public through marketing the cooperative work in the local community in order to face competition posed by foreign investments;



- Funding of projects collecting simple monthly contributions from local citizens, and then applying them to borrow for local investment;
- Infrastructure and facilities improvement through participation of village inhabitants in restoration and building of irrigation channels in the orchards.

9.- Assessment and analysis of the social production of the project/ the initiative

How far did the project achieve its targets and building social capital?

Despite impediments and weak potentials of the local community, the project attained its most-important targets, namely: the organization of the community to join forces and pool resources and create collective, organized work. This has enhanced the unity of the society and its ability to realize its rights and potential, as well as motivate the community to work for further self-development. Moreover the project helped to establish collective investment projects yielding collective benefit.

How far is the project linked to habitat social production?

The experience represents a practical model for the concept of the habitat social production crystallized in the community's initiative to know its entity, needs and problems and try to solve them and to set plans for solving problems, provide the needs and cooperate in its fulfillment, development and improvement of work, interaction and cooperation with the near and far surrounding in order to support the project, enhance its efficiency and make use of the potentials and expertise of others in attaining a sustainable social and economic development.

10.- Results and lessons learnt from the project/ the initiative

Chief among the lessons learnt from these experiences are:

1. how to identify and maximize the potential of the community, despite their financial and other weaknesses and to transform those into positive social action;
2. the significant role of youth in building social awareness;
3. the importance of social solidarity, especially among the poor and deprived, in order to defend themselves and solve some of their problems.

Other aspects were also emphasized such as:

1. importance of awareness of human rights, laws, local and international systems that can compensate for the weaknesses of the local community in confronting the strengths of the community's competitors in the course of development and empowerment of the local community;
2. the significance of the community identifying and knowing their own potentials, the needs, weak points and strengths so as to plan strategically toward success of the initiative/project. The initiative has also proved that even if the community were fewer in quantity and weaker in quality, it still possesses dormant potentials and capacities that just need to be mobilized.

Future vision for the possibility of repeating or developing the project/ the initiative:

Ten years after the beginning of the project, and despite all obstacles that hampered it, it managed to resist external control and realize self-determined development. Having assessed the experience, factors of success can be defined in: organization, institutional collective work relying on determination of needs and directed to the society. This constitutes a strong positive indication for the sustainability of the project and the successful continuity of its programs.

How participating bodies can promote the project/ the initiative:

Organizers and participants can market these experiences through:

- Participation in the forum of local initiatives;
- Participation in any meetings or conferences related to any of the objectives of the project;
- Presentation of the project and its components to the visitors of the region, including citizens, national or international organizations;
- Cooperation with bodies interested in exchange of ideas and experiences.

11.- Contacts:

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