

Muazama Burkhanova, Tajikistan. [A thematic essay which speaks to Principle 16 on consultation and participation](#)

Environmental Problems and Sustainable Development in Tajikistan



Muazama Burkhanova is an energy-engineer, an economist, and an ecologist answering practically to all elements of sustainable development. She has worked long years in the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan as the head of Departments of Power and Water Problems, and Rational Environmental Management. Her desire to combine scientific ideas with their realization came through creation in 1995 of a public organization, Foundation to Support Civil Initiatives. It is the first nongovernmental organization of the Republic whose mission has been directed at development of democratic processes through the public sector and civil society. She has been the coordinator of initiatives of the Earth Charter in the Republic of Tajikistan since 1998.

Scientific-technical progress of the twentieth century, with its focus on the fast economic growth, has created abundant material wealth. At the same time, it has increased the pressure of the anthropogenic influence on the environment. As a result of the ruthless exploitation of natural resources, immense wealth is in the possession of a limited number of the world population, whereas the vast majority barely subsides in poverty on the rare humiliating hand-outs from the rich countries. Thus, unsustainable consumption leads humankind to unsustainable development.

The realization of the looming ecological catastrophe forced progressive people of the planet to seek ways of averting the global collapse. The reports of the Club of Rome, for example, made it possible to launch the world-level dialogues that were free from any political, religious, and nationalistic agendas and the influence of the rich states.

Tajikistan got involved in the consultation process in the end of the 1998, when the Fund for Support of Civil Initiatives of the Republic of Tajikistan became a focal point of the Earth Charter for Central Asia established by the Earth Council. In the fall of 2001, the Republican Conference “Tajikistan: The Way to Sustainable Development” was held in Dushanbe, the capital. The

Earth Charter was one of the main issues of discussion at this conference. The event was organized by the Tajik National Commission on Sustainable Development and the Fund for Support of Civil Initiatives.¹

The conference became the final stage in a series of national discussions and hearings held from 1999 to 2001 among governmental agencies, non governmental organizations, schools, universities, and local communities. The conference also adopted the comments and suggestions for the last draft of the Earth Charter on behalf of the Republic of Tajikistan, which were sent to the Earth Charter Secretariat. Among other comments on each paragraph of the last draft of the Earth Charter 2000, reasons were named for its slow dissemination. These included the need to simplify the text, so that it would be clear and accessible to every person, every family, regardless of their station in society, and not only for the specialists and the environmental activists. We felt the Earth Charter must not become yet another ecological initiative; it must reach the hearts of every lay person. Ways of using the Earth Charter principles in the everyday life of people should be developed. We said that besides the protection of the human rights and freedoms, declared in many international documents of the United Nations, the Earth Charter needed to make a stronger emphasis on the rights of Earth and the whole community of life, re-envisioning the environment as not simply an endless provider of natural resources, and protecting it from aggressive and thoughtless treatment. We believed the text should include a passage about the particular moral responsibility of state leaders at the highest level for any grave ethical violations in the treatment of the Earth which might harm living and the future generations.

In the beginning of the twenty-first century, political will consolidated at a global level. The heads of states adopted in 2000 the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the eight main goals of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that represent the agreed upon international indices by which to assess future results. It is worth noting that Goal 7 of the MDGs, “Ensure environmental sustainability,” is a multi-sectoral task, and it plays the leading role in achieving all other the Millennium Development Goals.

In addition to global appeals, we see our personal call and input in the following expression: “think globally, act locally”. The development and realization of the programs for sustainable development and environmental sustainability at the local level is one of the main directions of the work of the Republic of Tajikistan NGO, “Foundation to Support Civil Initiatives” (FSCI). The FSCI acts as a coordinator and the expert in the development and realization of the Local Environmental Action Plans (LEAPS). This program raises awareness of grave ecological distortions at the local level, thus influencing long-term national strategies by involving NGOs, scientists, independent experts, and other representatives of civil society.

Another important component of this program is its multi-sectoral approach to decision-making processes. The participation of governmental representatives in the meetings of The Multiparty Council signals that LEAPs are gaining official recognition. At the same time, traditional knowledge of local population is taken into serious consideration during the discussions in The Multiparty Council. They try to reach the decisions that will fully reflect the priorities of the different national districts, enhance the involvement of the local communities and local municipalities, and answer the needs of the local population.

The selected priorities of our LEAP program on the local level speak about the principles of sustainable development and Earth Charter values. Part of this program conducts trainings corresponding to the aims of project. Our training reflects the following basic principles of the Earth Charter: sustainable consumption of living, deepened awareness of environmental and economical issues, and empowering people to take concrete actions.

During the period of July 2004 to February 2005, the FSCI successfully carried out a concrete pilot project that resulted in consulting and training activities. Accomplished with the help of the network of the national territories interested in the LEAPs, this pilot project focused on the development of environmental governance for the country’s capital, Dushanbe. The FSCI experts worked out the indicators for the detailed analysis of the situation, the potential of the terrain, the priorities for the given region, the results and the recommendations of the project and, finally, the development of the pilot projects for the integration of the environmental and socio-economic objectives facing the city.

As an outcome of this project, the FSCI presented a concise report and recommendations that were accepted by the authorities, approved by the city hall, and included into the plans for Dushanbe’s urban development. Some of our urgent recommendations have already received financial support, for example, the approval and the financing of the building of a waste processing plant in Dushanbe.²

At the time of this writing, the FSCI has initiated an educational

program focused on ways of resolving the multitude of problems facing the city council and the inhabitants of Dushanbe. This has opened a lot of opportunities for the propagation and dissemination of ideas and principles of the Earth Charter, particularly its ethical approach to the Earth – to the extent that the city council of Dushanbe is now considering taking up a long-term sustainable development program based on environmental priorities.

During the training seminars and presentations, it became clear that the development of short- and long-term programs of environmental governance is impossible without using the ethics and principles of the Earth Charter. The Earth Charter Education Toolkit can be used with young and adult persons, students, NGO’s, civil board organizations, and is relevant to educators and policy makers for discussion devoted to Earth Charter implementation. ●

Notes

- 1 The materials of the Republican Conference “Tajikistan: The Way to Sustainable Development” can be obtained at the website of our NGO “Foundation to Support Civil Initiatives”: <http://fsci.freenet.tj/>, section “Publications”.
- 2 The Program of the Environmental Management of the Dushanbe city can be found at the websites: <http://fsci.freenet.tj/>, www.untj.org/library/, www.dushanbe.tj/.