

Environmental Education Project: Kazakhstan

Mid term report

Prepared by project partners of PECE-1 November 2005

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Purpose: The purpose of the project is to explore mechanisms for informing the poor and vulnerable rural populations about environments seriously contaminated by radio-activity allowing them sufficient information to continue their subsistence livelihoods whilst avoiding the very serious negative effects on themselves and their families entailed in continuing to exploit contaminated landscapes.

Background: The testing of nuclear weapons during the Soviet era has left some seriously contaminated environments in Kazakhstan that impact seriously on the health and wellbeing of rural communities who exploit these resources through agriculture or extensive livestock grazing. These communities are typically poor and very vulnerable to any threat to reduce their exploitation of these resources. There are few alternative livelihoods available.

During the cold war era these communities were kept in ignorance of the effects of radiation and of the pathways and processes of contamination. This culture tends to persist today and rural communities rarely can access sufficient information (in a form that is useful) to be able to better plan their use of the landscape to minimise the potential contamination of themselves and their families and hence the associated health risks.

This PECE project follows on from a similar DFID funded intervention to map and quantify the radiological risks around Semipalatinsk and make this information available to local communities. The PECE project aims to field test different formats for information presentation in the village of Kainar close to the Semipalatinsk polygon.

This will be supplemented by the production of children's stories introducing and illustrating the avoidance of radio-active contamination in an entertaining way.

The outputs of the PECE project will be made available to workers in other contaminated areas of Kazakhstan for adaption into their own mitigation strategies

Progress: Work effectively started with the visit of Robert Ridgway (NRI) to the Area in May 2005 (RR was also employed as a participatory land use planner on the DFID project and thus had a thorough understanding of the problems faced by the farmers). At this visit he assisted the Eco Museum to design a programme of work to design posters and leaflets and framework for their field testing in Kainar Village.

Success was to be measured subsequently by assessing the effective uptake of these recommendations by the people at large.

Since work has started Eco Museum report the production of a series of educational leaflets and posters with simple explanations how to reduce risks from contamination from the Polygon. They have also produced a draft map of the Polygon showing the highly contaminated test areas where people should not use the land and water for grazing animals or for haymaking etc. They found some additional money in OSCE to distribute their environmental educational materials not only in Kainar but also in other villages in Polygon region. This interaction with the villages is leading Eco Museum to revise and refine the map and some of the other material.

In May-June, 2005 they prepared Exhibition about social problems associated with health issues and the need to provide safety for local population of Polygon region. This Exhibition was presented in Astana on Parliament Hearing in 24 June, 2005.

All the above material has been produced in both the Russian and Kazakh languages.

The children's story book has been written in Russian and has now been submitted to the translator to turn it into Kazakh.

Plans: During November, Eco Museum plan to revisit Kainar to evaluate the impact of the posters and leaflets through meetings with the authorities, with teachers and health professionals and to the extent possible with traditional livestock herders.

Once again feedback from the village will allow a degree of fine tuning to the educational material should this be necessary.

Finances: Eco Museum have just submitted their first invoice for fees and T&S for work done so far. This has been paid. It is gratifying that they will be able to conduct the second study visit to the Polygon in rather greater depth than was originally envisaged, thanks to the transfer of Robert Ridgway's T&S budget lines to the use of the local partners. Greater opportunity for interchange, and perhaps more villages included in the sample may delay the date of the project end.

Eco Museum raise an important local issue. They stress that it is important to show to Kazakhstani tax department that the moneys received are from a DEFRA Official (Government) grant if they are to avoid losing a significant proportion as taxes. NRI will revise the contract with ECO Museum to make this explicit. At some stage it may be helpful if DEFRA could make available some official document to reinforce this point.