



Participatory approach to soil erosion and poverty

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Soil erosion and poverty are major factors of soil degradation in Moldova. Various attempts were made to control soil erosion but the most efficient was participatory approach developed and implemented by NGO BIOS in three pilot villages (in the South, Center and North of the country) in 1999-2006. Many of the soil erosion control actions were simultaneously addressing poverty of rural families.

Based on soil, water and biodiversity research and assessment of soil erosion risk, land management plans were developed in pilot villages together with farmers, local public administration and other concerned parties. The plans were developed in conjunction with community development plans targeted to prior needs of communities. The soil conservation actions comprised agronomic, soil management and mechanical measures for reducing rain splash and runoff impact on arable land, orchards, vineyards and pastures. They comprised soil conservation, pollution prevention, as well as social and economic development of villages.

Soil erosion is closely related to poverty Participatory approach tools were used to address soil degradation and poverty simultaneously. In trying to assist the poor with their problems participation was used to win their cooperation and to seek for solutions that would address both problems. Participation is both the mechanism and the reward of cooperation. We found together the best solution for soil erosion control and increasing the productivity of farm crops and local population themselves offered to participate in the development and implementation of soil protection actions. The actions on soil, water and biodiversity conservation were implemented by farmers on their land, by local public administration, local population, including children – on the public land and water resources. All the community population have to gain from undertaking antierosion actions: farmers – in maintaining soil fertility and increased

farm crops yields, local population – from improving the conditions for leisure (the most degraded land were afforested, village parks were built, water reservoirs were cleaned, etc.), children – from improvement of their knowledge and skills when participating in various environmental protection events and actions. Poverty and poverty threats have decreased due to improvement of soil productivity and value of land, obtaining by-products through conservation activity, improvement of skills on farm management, creation of mutual support groups, etc.

Much damage to soils in Moldova is done through ignorance. Awareness building in soil conservation is essential. A continuing Soil Campaign was implemented by NGO BIOS during 1999-2006 in cooperation with over 40 partners which comprised, among others, the following activities: 8 contests for the young generation to communicate with older ones in order to find out the best soil conservation actions. Based on contest works, books of children and for children were published as follows: a book of fairytales in soil conservation, a book of poems and drawings in environmental protection, an ecological ethical code, etc., which were disseminated in schools; soil protection lessons were carried out in primary schools using the books of fairytales and poems; plans for beautifying rural communities were developed through participatory events; micro projects developed by children were implemented in different villages of the country, scouts' activities related to environmental protection were supported. Other products and activities included: radio programs and radio materials in environmental protection and social work, ecological performances of schoolchildren and kindergarten children, tree planting days with training sessions, ecological lessons, environmental protection excursions, a quarterly bulletin with an educational insert for children, a methodology for education and training in environment protection, seminars, workshops, training courses, round tables, conferences, study tours, exhibitions, publications for farmers, including farmer's book, sustainable agriculture etc. A practical training program for farmers in soil conservation was carried out. Many of the poorest farmers improved their circumstances through improvement of their knowledge.

Many of the activities in soil, water and biodiversity conservation were replicated in other villages thus contributing to self proliferation of the participatory comprehensive approach to soil erosion and poverty.