

Moving the **FRONTIER**



THE STORY OF THE SARHAD PROVINCIAL CONSERVATION STRATEGY

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Mark Halle

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*Photo: Panel
responding to
questions from
an engaged
community.*



Introduction

The adoption by the Cabinet of the Pakistan National Conservation Strategy (PNCS, or NCS) in March 1992 marked a major milestone in Pakistan's environmental history. A massive effort, involving hundreds of specialists over a period of six years, the PNCS broke new ground in many ways—through extensive use of public consultation, reliance on national expertise wherever possible and the clever use of communications techniques. The PNCS also broke new ground through the deliberate, patient effort to build ownership in the strategy from the upper levels of government, to the academic and research communities, and to the civil society structures concerned with environment and development on the ground.

The PNCS presented the most detailed assessment of Pakistan's environmental situation to date, and identified a range of activities that, if faithfully implemented, would slowly shift the juggernaut of Pakistan's development process into a sustainable channel. Nobody expected the government to drop everything and to focus single-mindedly on implementing the PNCS; the formal adoption of a strategy is only a crossroads in a long, winding journey replete with pitfalls, roadblocks and reversals.

As it turned out, however, PNCS struck a fortunate confluence of events. Initiated at the beginning of what turned out to be an exceptional wave of international interest in the environment, it rode this wave astutely. The project's crest coincided with the Earth Summit—a mere three months after the strategy's adoption—and

the exceptionally strong fascination with the planet's environmental priorities within the donor community.

The PNCS is being implemented under the lead of the federal government and through a complex, ambitious and multi-faceted programme of work at the national level. While there have been setbacks, and while not all of the strategy's recommendations have been faithfully implemented, there can be no doubt that the whole PNCS process contributed to a significant growth in environmental awareness in Pakistan. The PNCS process can claim a part—often an important part—in generating much of the environmental action which has taken place in the past decade in Pakistan.

This booklet is not the story of the PNCS. That tale has been told in the volume entitled *The Story of Pakistan's NCS*. It is, instead, something of a sequel. It is the story of how the PNCS experience was taken to the next step; how it was taken to the provincial level and, experimentally, to the district level in Sarhad (also known as the North West Frontier Province).¹ Here, at the level where development is not simply planned but practised, the PNCS philosophy met its first real test.

For the committed environmental professional, there can be no greater challenge than arriving at the point where environmental theories, environmental ideas, even environmental enthusiasm are confronted with reality—a reality that is often grim, often delightful, and very often

¹ The terms "Sarhad," "North West Frontier Province (NWFP)" and "Frontier" are used interchangeably to designate the province. This text has favoured "Sarhad" (literally "Frontier" in Urdu), simply because it is the "S" in "SPCS." As far as this author could determine, there are no political implications attached to the choice of "Sarhad" for the project title.

unexpected. This story examines how well the environmental approach stood up to the realities of a sometimes stagnant bureaucracy, a development process locked into the political game and the relentless grind of poverty, traditionalism and the pressing needs of those lacking basic social services.

The story is in part just that—an account, a brief chronology of what happened, who was involved and what stages the project went through, from its origins in 1991–92, through elaboration (Phase I), the transition to implementation (Phase II) and the launch of the Partnerships for Sustainable Development in the NWFP programme in mid-1998 (Phase III). It attempts to understand what challenges were faced, how they were overcome or how aspirations had to be scaled down, and what was learned in the process. This story is a rich, complex and at times amusing one, of courage and vision, but also of private ambition and of bureaucratic resistance.

It is a story that could be written at length and in detail, and it might prove edifying to do so, especially for those who were involved in the Sarhad Provincial Conservation Strategy (SPCS). But this is not the main purpose of the SPCS story. The history is presented in summarized form in Section I, focusing on the features, events, personalities and highlights necessary to understand how the SPCS was initiated, how it developed and what impact it has had to date. This history, presented in the first part of this publication, provides a framework for the rest. Section II looks at the story of the SPCS from a different angle, telling the story of some of the tools, approaches and mechanisms used in the project and reflecting on their success or on their limitations. Section III examines the dilemmas the project faced and the balances that had to be struck in order to advance the environmental agenda in a place and at a time that do not necessarily give it high priority—or call it by another name. It suggests some lessons that may be drawn from the Sarhad experience that may prove useful for other such projects in Pakistan and elsewhere. Finally, Section IV relates the SPCS to the context of broader global change, and seeks to demonstrate that, if the SPCS was often too far ahead of its time in Sarhad, it was well “in synch” with the global movements that are beginning to question and redefine how development is conceived, planned and implemented.

This account is not in any way intended to be a formal review or evaluation of the SPCS or any aspect of it. Many such reviews exist [see Annex I] and were drawn upon to provide material for this story. Neither the time devoted to reviewing the material, nor the range of people spoken to, permit considered judgments to be cast on people or events, and this is not the purpose. And, while broad in scope, the SPCS story does not aim to be entirely comprehensive. That would require a thorough journey through the province, through the archives and dialogue with the many hundreds of people involved directly or indirectly in the project. Many of these have moved on from their posts, have left the province or have chosen other walks of life. Instead, this publication is based on a 10-day visit to Pakistan, a review of hundreds of pages of written and printed material, and interviews with a range of people in the provincial government, IUCN, academic institutions, NGOs and the media.

With such a short time available, writing the story was possible only because of the valuable research and writing assistance of Ali Qadir, formerly of IUCN Pakistan, and of a wide range of IUCN staff in Peshawar and Karachi, among whom the former Head of the IUCN Sarhad office, Gul Najam Jami, stands out in particular. Full points, both for substance and for persistence, go to Mohammad Rafiq, IUCN Pakistan Country Representative, and Aban Marker Kabraji, IUCN Regional Director for Asia, who have never been known to allow reason to get in the way of doing what they decide to do. The latter, in particular, played a crucial role throughout the SPCS process, mostly behind the scenes.

In the end, however, the image I offer of the project is my own; what judgments the text contains reflect my opinion. It engages neither the International Institute for Sustainable Development nor IUCN, much less the other participants in Sarhad or elsewhere. As with any history, it reflects my selection from among thousands of facts, opinions and impressions, written and oral. That selection, in turn, reflects the standpoint from which I approached the task. In the interest of clarity and transparency, the main characteristics of this standpoint are:

- there is no place to start from but here, and no time but now: any approach to development must take as its starting point the realities of the place and time in which it unfolds;

- sustainable development will not be achieved, nor brought much closer through piecemeal action;
- sustainable development requires an economy, a political system and a governance structure that create incentives for sustainability, consequently, action on the policy framework for development is essential;
- the deep-seated changes required to bring about sustainable development cannot be expected to take place through government action alone;
- these changes will come about when people affected by decisions play a central role in taking those decisions;

- thus the achievement of sustainable development will require a major change in governance and in the organization of society;
- this can take place by revolution, but history shows that it is more likely to take place successfully if it evolves over time; and
- all experimentation and innovation that pioneers new forms of governance and decision-making relating to natural resources are welcome as they advance the process of change.

My interest in the project, and the judgments I make, directly or by implication, are unashamedly shaped by the above considerations.

Moving the
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The Story of
the Sarhad
Provincial
Conservation
Strategy

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Photo: Public consultations played a key role in the preparation of the SPCS.



Section I: From Planning to Realization

The roots of the Sarhad Provincial Conservation Strategy (SPCS) go back to 1980, when IUCN—The World Conservation Union, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) collaborated to produce the World Conservation Strategy (WCS). The WCS in many ways marked a watershed in the international conservation movement. Abandoning the adversarial position—opposing development because of its negative impact on natural resources and ecosystems—the WCS accepted that, for most of the world, development was the imperative. Only development that did not integrate environmental concerns was doomed to failure. Environment and development—sustainable development—had to advance together, or both would fail. This early expression of the purpose of sustainable development was adopted seven years later by the Brundtland Commission, whose definition of sustainable development, modelled closely on the WCS, still prevails today. Sustainable development, by that definition, is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Publication of the WCS also changed IUCN for good. From an organization devoted to saving endangered species and protected areas, it turned its focus towards the development process, and deliberately set about building the skills needed to integrate environmental considerations into development planning and practice in such a way as to promote development that is sustainable—development, in other words, that is economically efficient, socially equitable and

environmentally sustainable. It is difficult, without having lived it, to understand just how profound a transformation this was. IUCN did not abandon its dedication to living natural resources; simply, it understood that it would have to influence the entire process of planning and implementing development if these resources were to be saved from depletion.

IUCN’s relations with developing countries had, before the WCS, been confined essentially to the biological research community and to conservation professionals within or outside government. Suddenly, IUCN’s message was relevant to the central concerns faced by these countries and its services were in high demand. In 1981, IUCN set up the Conservation for Development Centre to respond to requests for assistance in implementing the WCS. In 1983, at the invitation of the IUCN’s Focal Point in the Federal Government of Pakistan—the Inspector

Box 1. What were “Focal Points”?

Focal Points were mid-level professionals hired by IUCN and placed at the disposal of the relevant department of the provincial government. They were paid by IUCN but they reported to the Director of the SPCS as well as the Secretary of the concerned department. They wore several hats: they were agents of change; integrators of environmental concerns into routine development work; and promoters of what was embodied within the SPCS philosophy.

General of Forests, W. A. Kermani—an IUCN mission visited the country and recommended the initiation of a national conservation strategy, aimed at applying the prescriptions contained in the WCS at the national level.

The Story of Pakistan's NCS has been eloquently told by David Runnalls, President and Chief Executive Officer of the International Institute for Sustainable Development. It chronicles the momentum generated by government and non-governmental actors alike, in a unique spirit of partnership. IUCN led the process from its initiation in 1984 to approval of the NCS in 1992.

The approval of NCS was a high point in the country's environmental movement. It was marked by a sense of euphoria and a spirit of partnership in civil society and government alike, and high hopes were pinned on its active implementation. IUCN facilitated a series of workshops in 1991 and 1992 to discuss the implementation of the NCS, and recommended three sets of action: (1) the formation of an NCS Unit in a strengthened Environment and Urban Affairs Division of the federal government and a new Environment Section in the federal Planning and Development Division; (2) private sector and non-governmental action to be led by the newly-formed Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI); and (3) action on the ground to be led by the provincial governments. IUCN also engaged in a comprehensive follow-up programme based on the NCS recommendations.

A series of workshops was held by the provinces to discuss their role in NCS implementation. At the workshop in Peshawar in August 1991, the Sarhad government expressed its desire to build on the NCS with a provincial conservation strategy to guide actions on the ground and demonstrated its good faith by establishing an Environment Section in the provincial Planning and Development Department. The provincial government recognized that the NCS was, of necessity, generic in its prescriptions, and that the province of Sarhad required its own strategy to guide activities and future planning. In January 1992, the government organized a two-day workshop to plan the Sarhad Provincial Conservation Strategy.

Much of the credit at this early stage goes to Dr. Tariq Banuri, the first Director of SDPI. A strong proponent of provincial strategies, he provided considerable intellectual input to the discussion on implementing the NCS, and

pointed IUCN towards Sarhad as providing favourable ground for experimentation in sustainable development. Through his contacts in Peshawar, he persuaded the provincial government to look positively on what eventually became the SPCS, and helped make some of the critical connections on whose foundation the initiative was built.

Inception: January to June 1992

In addition to the role of Dr. Banuri, there appear to be four essential reasons why the Sarhad government was the first to step forward to develop a provincial conservation strategy, building on the momentum generated by the NCS. First, and perhaps most important, was the vision and impetus provided by the chief bureaucrat responsible for development in the province, the Additional Chief Secretary (Development), Khalid Aziz, a close friend of Banuri. Mr. Aziz firmly believed that a provincial process, based on the NCS, could significantly improve development success in the province. In this he was not atypical of the leadership in the province. The people of Sarhad are, in general, particularly close to their rural roots, and therefore well aware of the fragility of the environment.

The heavy presence of indigenous and donor-assisted projects in the Sarhad, especially in the natural resources sector, also predisposed the province to a process for building environmental considerations into development. Further, with a significant portion of Pakistan's remaining forest resources in its territory, Sarhad has a high concentration of rural development and natural resource management projects and many donors, including the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), actively promote the integration of environmental concerns in development planning (though, unlike the SPCS, mostly with a sector focus). This creates a more conducive atmosphere for environmental strategy planning than might have been encountered in other parts of the country. Many in the Sarhad bureaucracy were, because of this, sensitive to the importance of environmental concerns. This meant that there was a cadre of senior civil servants around Khalid Aziz who supported taking strong action on the environment.

Finally, the government of Sarhad at the time was widely recognized in Pakistan as being the most forward-looking of the four provincial

governments. It had been the first to experiment with a number of development initiatives, and the SPCS was yet another example.

After the workshop in January 1992, an SPCS Steering Committee was formed, chaired by the Additional Chief Secretary, and an SPCS support project² was established within the government. A strategic decision was taken at the time to house this unit in the Planning and Development Department, soon to be renamed the Planning, Environment and Development Department (PE&DD). One reason for this was that the PE&DD is the central department in the province responsible for development planning, including preparation of the Annual Development Plans. Further, an Environment Section had been established within the provincial PE&DD, modelled on the federal Planning and Development Division. The Sarhad Environment Section had a number of strategic strengths: it was new and energetic; it was supported entirely from the province's own money and not from donor assistance as was the case with other provincial environment sections, thereby giving it an independent character; it was headed by a dynamic individual committed entirely to the SPCS process, Mohammad Rafiq; and it was supported by IUCN, an organization coming fresh from the NCS experience and committed to sustainable development in Pakistan for the long haul.

IUCN facilitated the process by hiring Dr. G. M. Khattak as a programme coordinator. A former Chief Conservator of Forests for Sarhad and Director General of the Pakistan Forest Institute and a widely-respected environmental figure and academic, he played a key role throughout the first years of the SPCS, serving as a mentor for IUCN in the province he knows so well, and guiding IUCN around a number of obstacles. It was indeed Khattak who identified Rafiq as a young and promising forest officer, not long back from academic training in the United States. Khattak and Rafiq put together a proposal to the SDC, which was rapidly approved. The first phase of the project began in July 1992.

The amazing pace at which the project was initiated merits attention. The National Conservation Strategy proposal had taken a year to be accepted by the government following the

initial scoping mission in December 1983, and a further two years before the initial phase of the project actually began. In fact, work on the NCS *per se* did not begin until 1988, more than four years after the proposal was mooted with the federal government. The SPCS, by contrast, was committed to, planned and begun in a space of less than one year. Certainly it profited a great deal from the momentum of the NCS, which drove the provincial administration to deliver on expectations raised by the NCS process, and to take advantage of the opportunities it offered. The donors, too, were eager to support innovative environmental initiatives with the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro just around the corner.

The workshop in January 1992 opted for a somewhat different route to SPCS formulation from that adopted by the NCS:

- it envisioned preparation of a draft SPCS that would serve as the basis for a thorough process of consultation before being finalized;
- it decided to strengthen the capacity of the PE&DD in parallel with the preparation of the strategy document, thus preparing for the time when the department would need to take it to implementation, and also introducing new approaches to planning; and
- on demand from participants in the 1992 workshop, and in keeping with the action-oriented nature of the project team, it was decided to undertake some implementation activities in parallel with strategy formulation.

The latter was a substantial innovation—not only did it aim to take immediate action to address well-known environmental priorities, it also aimed to build public and political support for the strategy by demonstrating in practice the sorts of results which might stem from the strategy once completed. The combination of these three factors set the SPCS apart from the NCS by its considerably greater reliance on the strategy process, and its consequent lesser focus on the content of the final document. The process was ably supported by a project team that grew in size as the initiative grew in stature.

In March 1993, the Programme Coordinator

² This story refers frequently to the “SPCS” and to the “SPCS project,” or simply “project.” When the former is used, it refers either to the government-led process to develop and implement the strategy, or to the strategy document itself, which should be clear from the context. When the project is meant, the term “SPCS support project,” “support project” or “project” is used.

(Khattak), the Head of the Environment Section in PE&DD (Rafiq) and a Project Coordinator (Hameed Hassan) on secondment from the provincial government, were joined by a Canadian Technical Adviser, Stephan Fuller. Fuller brought with him years of experience in provincial conservation planning in Canada—including in development-challenged areas in the Canadian Arctic—and in the integration of environmental considerations in development planning. Fuller's arrival not only brought fresh perspectives, but also considerable methodological rigour to the team. His contribution to the conceptual structure of the report proved invaluable. Fuller remained with the SPCS project until January 1997.

The “personality factor” also proved important to the SPCS. Khalid Aziz served as a critical ally to the project, moving it quickly through the approval stages and ensuring the full support of PE&DD. It is doubtful whether the project

could have moved so quickly without his consistent support. He also played a pivotal role in supporting some of the project's more notable innovations—for example, public consultations, which are often regarded as politically sensitive in Pakistan. Aziz also helped secure and maintain the support of the Chief Minister (head of the Sarhad Government) and of the chief donor agency, SDC. SDC's policy of supportive non-interference, its willingness to engage at the conceptual level, stimulating without imposing ideas, enabled the team to innovate and proceed in a spirit of strong partnership with the donor.

Rafiq was another critical driving force, taking the lead within PE&DD in developing the initial project proposals, as well as the Inception Report. Fuller and Khattak provided conceptual structure to the process, especially in the areas of forestry, natural resource management and agriculture.

In fact, it is clear that the composition of the early team determined to a large extent the direction that the project took. The heavy focus on forestry took root from the expertise of both Khattak and Rafiq, while the structure of the Inception Report and the SPCS drew on Fuller's considerable experience with strategic planning for environment and development in the Canadian North. The “two-track approach” adopted, supporting demonstration projects simultaneously with strategy formulation, was a direct reflection of the inclination of the project team, as was the decision to approach strategy formulation and preparation for implementation as parallel and complementary. So too, it must be said, was the relative lack of focus on the private sector, or on the rapidly changing policy context. This bias made its way through to the SPCS support project.

Early on, as can be expected with any change process, the project team began to face adverse reaction from within government. The idea of bringing an organization like IUCN, at the same time international and Pakistani, into the heart of government planning was threatening to some. And opening the planning process to civil society involvement, a central theme of the project design, certainly deviated from the norm of linear planning, although a few government officials could see the advantages. Some in the government began to perceive a threat to their established power roles—especially in their authority over planning—and although this did not hinder the project in the beginning, it sowed the seeds for later discontent.

Box 2. About the SDC's role.

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

It is customary in texts such as this one for the author to doff his hat perfunctorily at the donor. After all, without the petrol, the motor won't run. Without the generous funding from the Swiss taxpayer, SPCS might have remained a pipe dream.

As IUCN already knew, and as was amply confirmed in the SPCS process, SDC is much more than a donor. SDC support was consistent, helpful and strategic. They understood that SPCS had long-term objectives, and that it would face many obstacles in the course of its journey. They showed appreciation when things went well and understanding when they didn't.

The review and evaluation teams that periodically came to examine the SPCS made an important contribution to the process, and the various SDC desk officers in Islamabad were always ready to weigh in to support the process when it ran into difficulties.

The success of the SPCS is due in no small part to SDC's positive approach, to its experience and to its wisdom.

Elaboration: Phase I – July 1992 to June 1995

The sheer momentum of the initial process and the driving force of key individuals took the SPCS process a long way. The team put together a draft Inception Report in only a few months. This report was to provide a basis for launching a dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders, with every expectation that these would lead to a substantial shift in focus and emphasis for the SPCS. Commissioning and incorporating material from a range of sector-specific papers, the final version of the Inception Report was ready by October 1993. While the report was being prepared, the team reviewed how best to receive broad-based input to the SPCS. The final choice of consultative mechanisms rested on three fundamental considerations:

1. the need to receive broad-based input to “feed” the SPCS and to ensure a mesh between the technical analysis and the perceived needs of the province;
2. the need to build a strong sense of ownership in the province for the final strategy; and
3. the need to design a replicable model of strategic planning that reflected the realities and aspirations of people in Sarhad, and which could be adapted to lower political levels, to sectors of society or to issues.

The team decided to go for broad public consultations (PCs) in all 21 districts of the province [See Annex III]. A comprehensive plan for consultation in each of the district headquarters was prepared and presented to the SPCS Steering Committee and the government. Both readily accepted the proposal. A summary of the Inception Report was translated into Urdu,³ and a standard format was prepared to govern the conduct of the meetings. The first PC was held in Peshawar in late January 1994.

Despite all the planning and the hopes invested in it, the meeting in Peshawar was disappointing. Of the more than 100 people invited, only 15 turned up! The team’s morale plummeted, and they began to reconsider their assumption of broad public interest. But the second PC in Mardan, held just one month later, attracted over 300 people! They came from all walks of life, considered the ideas presented to them by the team, provided valuable input and expressed

their firm hope that the project would eventually materialize into concrete outputs. From there on, the momentum of success never let up. IUCN recruited two more coordinators, and the team divided into two to cover the massive agenda.

The district consultations progressed well, but the team realized after about eight consultations, that rural populations were poorly represented. The cross-section of participants at the district meetings was not representative of Sarhad’s overall population. The team decided to add a series of village consultations that would follow and complement the district PCs. The team worked around the clock to organize the meetings, prepare reports and feed the findings into a continuously changing SPCS framework. They also widened the net considerably, enlisting a number of NGOs to take charge of the consultations in the areas where they worked, and taking advantage of the presence of both government and donor-assisted projects working in particular districts. The SUNGI Development Foundation, for example, managed the consultative process in its Hazara heartland, as did the Human Resources Management and Development Centre (HRM&DC) in Southern Sarhad. HRM&DC and Integrated Development and Entrepreneurship Advisory Services (IDEAS)—another NGO—played a more general role, assisting with logistics and preparing the final reports. Separate consultations were held with women’s groups at the provincial level and in southern districts. Elsewhere, local women were encouraged to participate in the consultations.

Finally, to ensure broad-based technical input to the strategy, the team held 15 sector-specific consultations involving academia, the private sector and relevant government departments.

The SPCS document, produced in late 1995, drew heavily on input from the consultations. Indeed, the consultations resulted in one significant difference between the SPCS and the NCS: a prioritized list of sustainable development concerns in the province. The priorities reflected the overwhelming opinion of the people, and resulted in a strategic plan that could be used to prepare targeted interventions. At the same time, the comprehensive sector-specific papers added technical weight to the document. Close consultation with the finance department resulted in a realistic estimate of the funds that the provincial budget might allocate to strategy implementation,

3 The national language of Pakistan.

together with a prioritized budget for interventions.

It is striking to note the difference between the Inception Report and the SPCS document that emerged following the public consultations. The former was the work of the best experts in the province, supplemented with strong input from international experience. It represented the best analysis of the province's environmental priorities then available. However, what emerged from the consultations was a strong sense of where the people of Sarhad placed *their* priorities, and these were overwhelmingly in the fields of development and good governance. This paradox is explored in the third section of this story, but it is the combination of the team's initial environmental vision—and the popular demand for development—that gave the solid sustainable development content of the eventual strategy.

What set this phase of the project apart from similar planning initiatives, including the NCS, was the focus on an enabling process. The objectives of this phase reflect the process-orientation of the project, through its choice:

- to identify, develop and initiate pilot projects designed to test SPCS ideas in a sample of priority areas; and
- to provide technical assistance to strengthen the Environment Section of the PE&DD.

Ensuring progress towards both objectives simultaneously, while at the same time preparing the strategy, led to an expansion of the time frame of the first phase, but it paid off by anchoring the SPCS solidly in the ground realities of the province.

The first phase is broadly regarded as having been a success. The public consultations generated invaluable information and a “reality check” with the people of the province; the sector papers were more detailed and specific than those of the NCS; key NGOs were engaged and given a central role in the process; and the government, especially at the provincial level, was fully involved. This last feature was arguably the most significant of the formulation process. The Additional Chief Secretary supported and oversaw the formulation process with a personal interest. The provincial government, primarily the PE&DD, made sure that district administrations facilitated the public consultations, and representatives from the administration and line departments attended all of the district and village consultations. The Deputy Commissioners

at the district level were supportive, and the PE&DD observed the process of formulation closely.

The elaboration phase, like the inception phase, was driven to a large extent by personalities. Support from Khalid Aziz was critical, as was the momentum generated by the project team. Rafiq, as Head of the Environment Section, set the ball rolling within the government and then, in January 1994, moved to the forefront of SPCS team as the IUCN Programme Director. He led the team through the formulation phase, as the previous Director, G. M. Khattak, moved to a technical advisory role. Khattak provided conceptual input to the key forestry and agriculture components of the strategy while leading the project's innovations in the all-important forestry sector. At the same time, Stephan Fuller added his experience and critical perspective to the design of the SPCS. He played a key role in using the feedback from the consultations to refine the SPCS process and structure.

The first phase succeeded in demonstrating an alternative approach to strategic planning. The provincial government at the time appeared ready to embrace the practice of consulting civil society, academia and the private sector in strategic planning for development, and has since tried to replicate the process. However, no subsequent effort has succeeded in providing the comprehensive coverage that characterized the SPCS consultation process.

Regarding the document itself, the government accepted the directions emerging, led from the top by the Additional Chief Secretary and the new Chief Minister, Aftab Sherpao. However, the danger with relying on “champions” at the highest level soon began to emerge. When Khalid Aziz assumed the position of Chief Secretary, his replacement as Additional Chief Secretary for development was not as supportive and did not enjoy the same comprehensive understanding of the project. The process began to stumble near the end of the phase. It became clear that the project's objectives and philosophy had not been sufficiently internalized throughout the provincial government and even in PE&DD, especially at the middle levels.

The common assumption—that strong political support from the top would filter down and across the government—proved overly-optimistic. Indeed, such political messages rarely work down through a natural process of percolation. They require particular tools and a careful-

ly tailored communications mechanism, neither of which were in place. The cast of senior officials that began to flow through the government did not always accord the SPCS the same priority that the initiators had. Even when the SPCS was formally approved by the Sarhad cabinet in June 1996, there were delays in organizing its public launch. The new political set-up was hesitant to follow up on the SPCS, and recommended projects were not immediately initiated. Although the idea of civil society participation was accepted as a general philosophy, the civil service began to strengthen its core functions and isolate itself from intrusion. Access to financial resources in the provincial budget became difficult, and projects stemming from SPCS were rarely accorded funding priority. The deteriorating economy of Pakistan did not help.

Civil society partners, drawn into the process over the two years of consultations, began to question when the project would “deliver.” The project found itself in a dilemma: while the project team believed very strongly that the key to success was to be found in the process of preparing the SPCS and generating ownership in its content, the demand from partners was to start showing concrete outputs. Some NGOs suggested that the project “get its hands dirty” by giving priority to some on-the-ground field work. Although stakeholders readily accepted the SPCS in general terms, some confusion began to emerge about what to do next—there was no clear sense of commitment by organizations (in civil society, private sector and the government) to “take on” the SPCS agenda and begin to implement it.

PE&DD continued to support the SPCS, albeit with reduced dynamism owing to budget cuts, frequent staff changes and rapid shifts in the political signals received. Some departments, though, seized on the SPCS and began to implement some of its recommendations. The Forest Department, aided by funding from the Asian Development Bank, undertook major reforms advocated by the SPCS, but few other departments showed that sort of leadership.

While self-doubt is natural towards the end of a heady process, it is critical to intervene at key junctures to maintain momentum and to ensure a strong orientation towards continued progress. This was an ideal role for IUCN as the “outside” partner. While the SPCS team soldiered on to produce the strategy and secure its approval, IUCN might usefully have played a stronger role in helping think through the baseline require-

ments for success in subsequent stages. IUCN leadership, though it played out behind the scenes, was not always sufficiently forthright, and some confusion arose as to the relative roles of IUCN, the SPCS support project and the SPCS team.

It must be said that IUCN itself was to some extent sailing through uncharted waters. While the NCS experience gave IUCN some self-confidence, the experience was not automatically transposable to the provincial level, and specifically to the political environment of Sarhad. Particularly after the departure of Khalid Aziz, IUCN was obliged to devote a good deal of its energy to fighting attacks on the SPCS by its enemies in the bureaucracy. Running this sort of interference may not be very glamorous, nor much remembered in later years, but it can be fundamental to a project’s success.

This phase also appeared to have had limited success in communicating the very essence of its existence—preparation of a participatory strategy for sustainable development, which could be implemented by the people of the province themselves.

Perhaps the assumption was overly-ambitious. The project had, after all, entirely redefined the priorities for development, had intervened at a level not previously achieved, and had broken new ground on participation. These were radical departures from the norm, and the province was not ready simply to adopt them wholeheartedly.

A more robust handover strategy was obviously needed. The project decided to enter a second phase—the transition to implementation.

Transition to implementation: Phase II – July 1995 to June 1998

The period from 1995 to 1998 marked a deliberate transition to implementation. The Swiss agreed to extend another grant to facilitate this transition whose main objectives were:

- to strengthen capacity in provincial and district governments, civil society organizations and the private sector in the province for strategic planning and implementation;
- to strengthen partnerships with civil society and the private sector, generating enough capacity for the two to continue implementation of key components of the SPCS on their own; and

- the final publication and dissemination of the SPCS, and the implementation of priority projects identified in the strategy.

A critical assumption in this phase was that the political situation in the province would encourage and promote the involvement of communities and community-based organizations, as well as the private sector, in natural resource management. As it turned out, this was the period in which the country began to experience significant political turmoil. With the reshuffling of senior decision-makers in the province, the project could no longer count on the high-level support it had enjoyed earlier. Additional Chief Secretaries and Secretaries of PE&DD came and went, and the support project was not always high on their list of priorities. Some of them failed to grasp the significance of the project, or even felt threatened by it. Nor was the instability confined to the upper levels. Frequent staff changes affected the PE&DD, gradually eroding the relationship with the support project.

Another major assumption was that the support project would move into the next phase of implementation through strengthened institutions and supportive legislation. As it turned out, neither assumption proved to be correct. The capacity building initiatives undertaken in the first phase were poorly linked to the need to strengthen key institutions. New institutions—such as the Provincial Environmental Protection Agency—began to flounder virtually from the moment they were established, and funding to implement projects identified by the SPCS became increasingly scarce. Poor coordination in the donor community also influenced the SPCS. The Provincial EPA, instead of joining forces with—and seeking support from—the SPCS support project, preferred to hold out (vain) hopes for a major grant from the World Bank.

Importantly, the first phase of the project had accepted—largely as a result of the public consultations—that addressing key social issues was a prerequisite for success in the transition to sustainable development. The SPCS had to some extent addressed the social and economic context within the province, but in the end, it nevertheless focused principally on environmental factors, relying on other initiatives like Pakistan's Social Action Programme (SAP) to complement its work in the social arena. SAP, though, turned out to be an unreliable counterpart, and there

was in fact no other organized effort in the province to address social priorities with which SPCS could dovetail.

Matching the political instability in the country, project management also went through some rapid changes. In October 1996, Rafiq became Head of the IUCN Sarhad Program, and Alamgir Gandapur joined the SPCS project as Project Director, but found it difficult to steer the project effectively through the turbulent times.

Despite these problems, the project managed to stay on course. The political situation prevented immediate implementation, and the project had to show patience until a new government was established in February 1997. The new Chief Minister, Mehtab Abbasi, turned out to be a strong supporter of the environmental movement, and the project capitalized on his support. The Chief Minister's Deputy Secretary, Musharraf Rasool Cyan, played a key role in bringing the project to the attention of senior policy-makers, and in providing high-level support. An ex-Focal Point,⁴ Gul Najam Jamy took on the post of Project Director in June 1997.

Still, despite the fact that the SPCS had been formally adopted in June 1996, it had not been possible to overcome both the inertia and the pockets of resistance within the provincial government to publish the strategy and to undertake a public launch. IUCN and the support project saw an opportunity with the planned visit by the Director General of SDC to Pakistan to overcome this resistance to organize a formal launch of the SPCS in November 1997. Since the SDC had been the principal donor to the SPCS project and several other projects in the province, since it had played a consistent and active role in support of the process and since the provincial government hoped to secure further contributions from them for SPCS-related work, they could not afford to delay the launch any further.

The launch turned out to be a huge success. Not only did it raise the public and official profile of the project, it also marked the unofficial “re-launch” of the support project. In 1996, the project had already hired technical experts to serve as Focal Points in key line departments relevant to the SPCS, and had begun to establish Roundtables—topic-based fora gathering representatives from government, civil society and

⁴ See discussion on Focal Points below and in Part 3 of this Story.

the private sector. After the launch, and with the support of the new government, both mechanisms were reinvigorated.

One key innovation at this stage in the development of the SPCS process was the initiation of pilot district conservation strategies. The Chitral Conservation Strategy was initiated in mid-1997, and the Abbottabad Conservation Strategy followed soon after. They followed a process very similar to that of the SPCS.

The project achieved a great deal in establishing a “climate of confidence and mutual endeavour between government and civil society.”⁵ The Focal Points and Roundtables institutionalized the concept of participatory decision-making, and also influenced other development projects of donors, NGOs and the government. Their key success probably lay in the non-hierarchical processes adopted. These pioneered a move towards decentralization, which anticipated future developments.

At the same time, the project showed its vulnerability to political change. The rapid change-over of senior administrators continued to affect progress to an unacceptable degree. When a positive and benevolent officer was appointed to a post, the project could surge forward, but it was equally—if not more frequent—for the incumbent to try to marginalize the project and place obstacles before its progress. One of the longer-serving Secretaries of PE&DD remained deeply skeptical of the project. Although he could not stop a project that had already begun, he did place considerable roadblocks in its path.

The second set of problems—unfortunately all too characteristic of the implementation phase of strategic projects—began to emerge. Institutional roles and responsibilities had to be defined, leading to all-too-common “turf battles.” The authority and exact role of the Focal Points required clarification, as did the three-way interactions among the PE&DD, the Environmental Protection Agency and the SPCS support unit itself.

By June of 1998, it was clear that implementing the strategy would require considerably more attention than previously thought. Issues of political support, institutional capacity and, primarily, reaction to a redefinition of roles were critical. On the other hand, the project had succeeded in institutionalizing some key mechanisms, and had managed to raise awareness about

SPCS to a large degree, helped by the networks that were established and strengthened during the course of the project. The project could also build on the growing awareness among government, donors, NGOs and the public at large that environmental issues could be ignored only at extreme peril to development achievement.

In the final analysis, the expectations for uptake of the SPCS by external partners (government departments, select NGOs and the private sector) proved in some respects to be overly-ambitious. It is clear that the rigour and determination that went into constructing the SPCS had to be at least as sharp and as creative in facilitating and supporting the implementation, and in ensuring a gradual handover, whereby Sarhad-based actors assume responsibility for taking the strategy forward, and both IUCN and the project team gradually withdraw or take the strategy to the next levels. This in turn requires consolidating both awareness of, and commitment to, the SPCS beyond the few leaders in IUCN and government. During the transition to implementation, this was achieved to a limited extent, though the absence of clear commitment to the SPCS began to pose a serious problem.

It is certainly commendable that IUCN and the Sarhad government did not simply present the SPCS document and go home. Indeed, right from the start, it was clear that formulating the strategy was only a step in what would inevitably turn out to be a long and twisting road. If uptake of the SPCS recommendations by government was not always optimal, it was in fact phenomenal when compared to other policies and strategies prepared and promulgated in Sarhad in the years before and after the SPCS. So when compared with a glowing ideal, SPCS may have fallen short, but in terms of what it is possible to achieve in the current political, institutional and social environment of Sarhad, it did remarkably well.

At the same time, visible commitment by government to the SPCS is only one indicator of success. Many of the innovations pioneered by IUCN and the SPCS project may prove to have much more significance. The SPCS process succeeded, for example, in creating a tenuous alliance between government and the NGOs. The SPCS is the first government policy document to recognize and assign a role to civil society in the development process. SPCS opened a range of opportunities for NGOs to be repre-

5 Quoted from the second Mid-Term Review of the SPCS, 1997.

sented in government decision-making bodies and even, in some cases, to nominate their own representatives. As will be seen in the following part of the story, the SPCS was instrumental in creating and reinforcing NGO networks and service organizations, and in particular the Sarhad NGO Ittehad and the Frontier Resource Centre. The impact of these developments may not be felt immediately, but they represent the beginnings of a change whose reach could be very extensive.

Beyond SPCS: partnerships for sustainable development in the NWFP (PSDN)

Phase III – July 1998 to June 2001 and
Phase IV – June 2001 to the present

This story of the SPCS is intended to cover the initiation, preparation and launch of the strategy, and properly ends in mid-1998. For the period beyond that, which ushered in the start of the devolution, it is difficult to stand back and to achieve the perspective necessary to understand and interpret events. This short section is intended simply to reflect on the direction the process appears to be taking, and to indicate where problems have been overcome, or continue to plague the project.

The objectives of the SDC funding allocated for this third phase were to support capacity strengthening for SPCS implementation, with a focus on developing and reinforcing partnership arrangements. This would recognize the fact that SPCS was a fragile shoot that still needed nurturing if it was to grow more robust and put down deep roots in the political culture of the province.

At least in the initial stages, this has proved to be complex. The SPCS process found it difficult to escape the impact of the general economic decline and the political uncertainty that has characterized Pakistan over the past few years. People initially consulted and involved have not consistently been kept in the loop of developments, thereby creating resentment. The paucity of clearly visible outputs created frustration. The failure to launch anticipated demonstration projects proved important, especially for their sponsors. They were meant to provide a demonstration of the SPCS's ability to affect ground reality and their repeated postponement began to sow doubts as to whether the SPCS could, in fact, bring about real change.

Some of the problems that had emerged in the implementation phase from 1997, remained unresolved. Support for SPCS remains modest at the mid-levels of government, and continues to be eroded as staff are transferred and posts are dropped. Similarly, the frequent changes in management of the support project and in IUCN have taken their toll. There is little evidence of the key Sarhad NGOs or the private sector adopting the SPCS as a planning tool. In fact, the government itself stopped using the SPCS as a policy guide, due partly to staff changes, and began to feel that it was too diffuse and generic a document to help concretely. Similarly, the problem of redefining the role of government in general, and the roles and mandates of different sections in government in particular, became increasingly insurmountable as Pakistan sank into a period of political and financial uncertainty.

Some of these difficulties may be laid at the feet of IUCN or the SPCS team. Much, however, has to do with the context in which it worked, and to sheer bad luck. The two-year period between the approval of the SPCS and its launch was unfortunate. While it was not an idle period—far from it—it nevertheless proved impossible to sustain the momentum that had been generated, and the team was forced to devote far too much of its energy to fighting the system. This period coincided with a rapid cycling of government officers and an awkwardly high turnover in the SPCS team. None of that helped to keep up the momentum, or to hold together the body of knowledge and understanding that had been generated.

If things were difficult in the period from 1995 to 1997, they grew markedly worse. Six months after the launch of the SPCS in May 1998, Pakistan exploded a nuclear device and found itself cut off from much of its foreign aid and its lines of credit. With projects shutting down throughout the province, the government's priority turned away from innovation and experimentation, and focused on consolidating and saving whatever staff and activities it could. The SPCS sank in the government's list of priorities, and the donors were poorly placed to insist on its rehabilitation.

As if that were not enough, a military government took power in October 1999. As one of its first priorities, the military rulers focused on "cleaning out" what they deemed to be a deeply corrupt civil administration in Sarhad. A large number of civil servants were arrested, chased

out or transferred to other provinces and new ones shipped in from elsewhere. They brought with them a total ignorance of the SPCS. Those civil servants that remained kept a low profile and operated by the book. Any activity that smacked of innovation, experimentation and change was locked in the filing cabinet and forgotten. Prospects for the SPCS could not have been worse. Indeed, it is a significant tribute to the robustness and inherent rigour of the SPCS that it survived at all.

With the events of September 11, 2001, and the alliance over Afghanistan, Pakistan has been rehabilitated internationally, and the military government has gained broad acceptance—at least for now. Aid money is flowing again, and government attempts at controlling corruption in the civil service seem to be having an effect. The SPCS's star may be on the rise again.

There is, of course, considerable scope for SPCS to learn from its past and play a more central role in shaping development in Sarhad. However, clarity and focus seem to be an important pre-requisite, for concentrating on “upstream” vs. “downstream” impacts; for focusing on civil society vs. government; for trying to reform the government or trying to replace it, following the lead of the stakeholders or providing leadership and so on. One important message emerges: the process of strategic planning and social change is a continuous effort to strike the right balances. Success is determined by how well such a project has learned its lessons and builds on them in changing contexts to refine its balances.

Toward a new governance

The late Chinese Foreign Minister, Zhou Enlai, is famous for replying, when asked about the historical significance of the French Revolution, that it was too early to tell. The same can be said of the impact of the SPCS on sustainable development in Sarhad. Both the SPCS itself, and to some extent this story, have focused on how SPCS might have affected government development planning, how well environment has been integrated into the work of the provincial government and its line departments. But is that really the best indicator? Might the impact of the SPCS not be measured using other factors, such as impact on local government, on civil society or on the private sector? Or is it in introducing new thinking, new ideas and new institutional approaches that the SPCS will be found to have had its most lasting effect?

It is clear that IUCN and the SPCS project were ahead of their time. They pioneered approaches to development planning that were unfamiliar in the province, and succeeded in getting many of them rooted and accepted. They introduced methods and approaches whose significance will probably become clear over the coming years, and which may well prove to be more influential and a greater stimulus to change than the accumulated technical analysis and the kilos of documents, produced by the project teams.

One of the SPCS process's clear successes is the introduction and widespread use of public consultations—not only those conducted in the first phase of the project, but those that continued through involvement of NGOs and community-based organizations, through the district conservation strategies and in the Roundtables, to name a few. It may well be found, with the perspective of a decade or so, that this innovation led to a substantial change in development thinking in Sarhad, and proved a stimulus for a rapid shift to new governance thinking. Similarly, bringing together members of the private sector and civil society with government may have enshrined habits that will be hard to break and that will rapidly erode what once appeared to be the impregnable fortress of the bureaucracy.

It may even be aspects of the SPCS that were regarded as marginal at the time that end up having some of the strongest impact. The study undertaken under the auspices of the SPCS on the link between environment and security in the province, which has had a noted impact internationally, may prove to be the foundation for a new approach to evaluating the importance of environment and resource management, especially now that the region is at the centre of international attention and the debate is raging on how to stabilize Afghanistan and neighbouring regions, and how to ensure that the environmental root causes of conflict might be addressed.

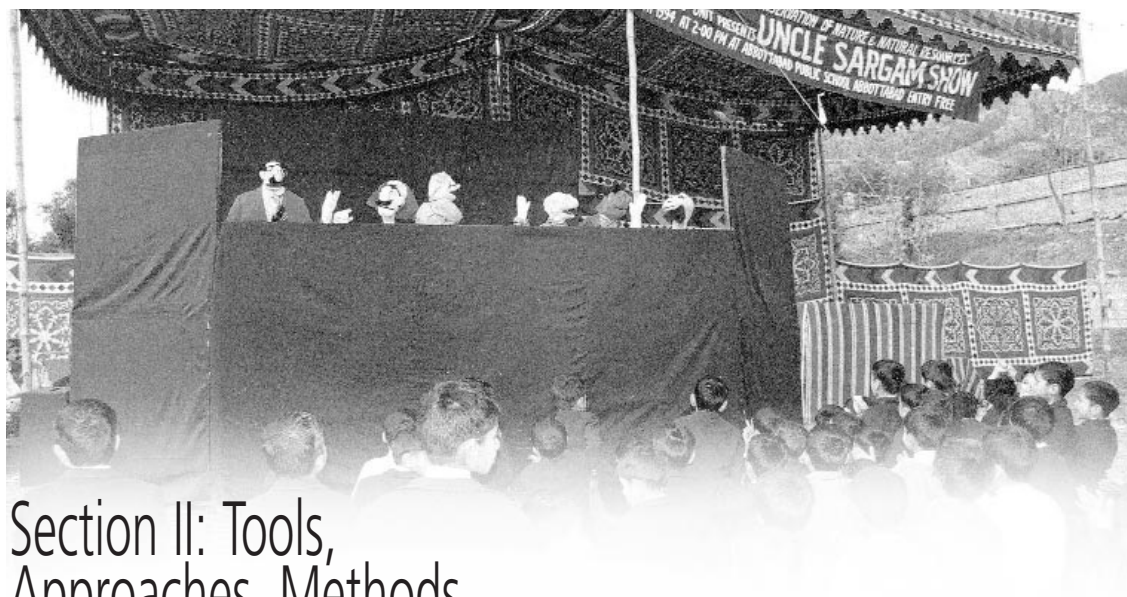
If there is one impressive feature of the SPCS process and the support project in particular, it is its willingness to adapt, to experiment, to innovate, to import and adapt new and interesting ideas, wherever they might come from. It is hard, in a brief account of this type, to convey the sense of excitement that characterized the project, particularly in the first years, before the hard grind of reality and bureaucratic resistance began to cause the first grey hairs, and before the geopolitical crisis shoved the SPCS somewhat

into the shadows. Nevertheless it is that openness, that ability to challenge assumptions, to revise one's own ideas in the face of new thinking that proved the most enduring strength of the SPCS process. That may be its most lasting legacy.

It is remarkable and instructive that those aspects of the NCS that are perhaps the most striking and are now having the deepest impact were not necessarily those that would have been chosen as the most likely candidates immediately

after the NCS launch, nor even after two or three years of implementation. Indeed, an assessment made of the impact of the NCS at a similar stage would certainly have been more pessimistic than one made today. A strategic planning process introduces many ideas, conducts many experiments and plants many seeds. The full impact of all of this creativity and energy begins to emerge only later—often years later. There can be little doubt that the same will prove true of the SPCS.

Photo: Uncle Sargam Show – part of SPCS’s connection strategy to check innovative approaches.



Section II: Tools, Approaches, Methods

The SPCS story is one of courage and persistence. Mistakes were made, or course, as they always are, and some of the experiments came to naught. But the project never ceased to innovate, to experiment, to seek new paths around obstacles and to encounter new ways of advancing its goals. IUCN, in particular, scoured its organizational experience, in Pakistan and elsewhere, for best practice examples that might apply to Sarhad, and cast the net wide in terms of identifying people and experience that could be recruited to the service of the SPCS.

What chance did the project have of reaching its goal “to secure the environmental, social and ecological well-being of the people of the NWFP through the conservation and sustainable development of the province’s natural resources”? Or, more fairly, what would constitute satisfactory progress down that path in a country where, despite some progress, “fundamental development constraints remain, including: inequitable economic growth and widespread poverty, feudal social structures that are reflected in political power relationships, absence of local government and exclusion of the majority of the population in decision-making and access to basic services, unabated environmental degradation and failure of institutions to provide sufficient integration of environmental, social and economic policy objectives”⁶

The SPCS set high ambitions, in an environment that was largely unfavourable. In such circumstances, good planning and persistence are

not enough to remove the many roadblocks. Success with the project required considerable risk-taking and innovation. Happily, the project showed a strong inclination towards both.

This section focuses on the innovative mechanisms that the project introduced, the experiments it conducted and the ideas it pioneered. It offers some reflections on the positive and negative experience that the SPCS process had with these mechanisms and suggests some lessons that might be drawn from the experience.

Some of these mechanisms are tried-and-true techniques in common use elsewhere; some were already in operation in the province. But their importation or adaptation in the context of the development challenges in Sarhad required considerable creativity. Other mechanisms were entirely new to the province. Some were new even to IUCN. The principal mechanisms are reviewed below:

The reality check: public consultations

Public consultations played a key role in the preparation of the SPCS. They proved relatively easy to organize, since they are not too far from the *jirga* system—the cultural tradition of participatory planning and decision-making in Sarhad. As noted above, once the Inception Report was ready in October 1993, the team sought broad-based feedback through a series of public consultations in all parts of the province.

⁶ NCS Mid-Term Review Report, 2000. Note that in respect of local government, things are changing quickly.

The objective was threefold:

- to understand how conservation and development problems and priorities were perceived by the people consulted;
- to ascertain how this perception differed from the technical analysis of the situation undertaken by the SPCS team; and
- to demonstrate that alternatives exist to the prevalent centralized, top-down, power- and influence-based approach to planning for development.

The last of these was particularly important, given the traditional government approach to planning: isolated, linear and based on limited data and the expertise of a handful of government officials.

The team proposed the extensive use of public consultations. Though there were pockets of resistance, the notion was broadly welcomed by the provincial government. The Chief Minister at the time, Aftab Sherpao, threw his support behind the public consultations, as did Khalid Aziz. The provincial government facilitated the consultations by ensuring that the Deputy Commissioner and relevant line department representatives attended the consultations.

The experience turned out to be an eye-opener for the administration and, as the consultations proceeded, they stimulated more active involvement by government departments. The public consultations were also regularly attended by participants from Chambers of Commerce and Agriculture, NGOs, community-based organizations, academia and local communities. Two local NGOs, IDEAS and HRM&DC were hired to assist in organizing and reporting on the consultations, and pinpointing ideas and recommendations that could be forwarded as inputs to the strategy itself.

Early on it was noted that, while the public consultations often led to lively debate, there was poor attendance by women, and those who came tended to remain quiet. While this was to be expected given the culture of the province and in particular the rural areas, views on the key issues and priorities of environment and development from the perspective of women were deemed essential. As a result, HRM&DC was asked to organize separate consultations with women and women's groups. Ultimately, five women's consultations were held (see Annex V).

The public consultation process was spearheaded by two teams (Mohammad Rafiq heading one; Hameed Hassan the other) that took comprehensive notes, feeding these to Stephan Fuller and G. M. Khattak to consolidate. As noted above, after the initial few public consultations at the district level, the team proposed to the government that select village consultations also be held.

Given the time constraints attendant on the project, this turned out to be an enormous task. The selection of target villages was to some extent arbitrary—one village was chosen in each tehsil (sub-district), providing a geographically-balanced coverage of the rural areas of the province. Only Chitral could not be covered directly, for logistical reasons. Instead, an arrangement was made with the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, which is active and organized in most of the villages of Chitral, to organize and run the consultations there. The village consultations proved to be hugely successful, and the participants greatly appreciated the rare opportunity to air their concerns. Other development projects active in the district or village weighed in by encouraging partner community-based organizations to attend and to mobilize their own constituencies. In all, public consultations were held in each of the 21 district headquarters in Sarhad, and in 40 additional villages.

Following this initial cycle, the SPCS team held 15 sector-specific consultations to review technical issues in greater depth. These consultations served essentially to provide feedback on the sector papers, and included a broad range of people and institutions (see Annex VI). Consultations were held, involving line departments, Chambers of Commerce and Agriculture, universities, the provincial Finance Department and, separately, with citizens' forums. The Finance Department, in particular, warned of the huge financial implications of the strategy.

The entire consultation process occupied a very substantial proportion of the SPCS team's time and resources from late 1993 to the end of 1994. The results of the various consultations were compiled and served as a principal input to the draft SPCS, which was drawn up in the course of 1995 and approved by the provincial cabinet in June of the next year.

Assessment

The strength of the public consultations was that they covered a commendable range of geo-

graphically-diverse and sector-specific stakeholders. The rich ore of ideas and perspectives mined from these consultations was refined and served as one of the major ingredients in the SPCS itself. The Strategy, as a result, rested on a much broader base of knowledge than would otherwise have been possible, and offered an accurate reflection of the issues and priorities in the province as seen by the principal stakeholders. The range of consultations appears to have struck a judicious balance between comprehensive geographical coverage and strategic sector-specific input, given the constraints under which the project was operating.

The project was also successful in demonstrating an alternative method of planning—involving all stakeholders in a process of consultation. The government recognized the value in this, and bought into it substantially. This initial enthusiasm can be attributed to a range of factors:

- genuine fascination with the ideas and perspectives emerging from the stakeholders;
- a sense that these ideas, if given a positive response, could confer some legitimacy to government departments suffering from poor public image; and
- the first rumblings of the call for devolution, which would require them to work more closely with the stakeholders in the future.

It is disappointing to note that this enthusiasm does not seem to have led to much uptake, and the public consultations undertaken as part of the SPCS process appear to be an isolated example, at least of such comprehensive coverage. Changing old habits does not take place overnight.

The general praise that the SPCS process deserves for the consultative process is marred by one issue. The attempt to build a sense of hope and ownership through the consultations succeeded, with the participants buying into the SPCS process to a significant degree. They were, in a sense, being asked to offer SPCS their confidence, and their trust that their inputs would lead to concrete improvements on the issues and priorities they had identified. Their trust was not placed in a document, but in the process itself, and the hope for change that it appeared to hold out. That trust must be maintained—and the level of interest sustained—until changes in ground reality begin to pay off.

Unfortunately, the consultations focused on the front-end need to assess priorities and glean

ideas for solutions. The consultation process, in a sense, was a taker. When the time came for SPCS to give in return, much of the enthusiasm had dissipated. Once the SPCS was prepared and approved, the momentum generated through the public consultations began to dissipate through poor communication with those who had participated, and through lack of visible, concrete outcomes in the form of development actions. The demonstration projects were slow to get off the ground (see discussion of demonstration projects, below), and much of the follow-up appeared to be focused on more planning, this time at a lower level (see discussion of District Conservation Strategies, below). So the opportunity to build and nurture a supportive constituency was not fully tapped, and the investment of trust on the part of an impressive range of stakeholders was not adequately put to productive use.

Calling in the stakeholders: Roundtables

A partial exception relates to the Roundtables established by the project and which have played an influential role both in the formulation of the SPCS and in the transition to implementation. The choice of this mechanism of Roundtables was influenced by the project team's experience with the NCS process, by experience from Canada introduced by Stephan Fuller and by Rafiq's exposure to comparable processes in the Netherlands. The first Roundtables were established in the first phase of SPCS implementation—in early 1995—as an innovative vehicle both for promoting stakeholder buy-in to the SPCS and as a tool for spreading the responsibility for implementation beyond the public sector. The idea was to bring concerned individuals from government, civil society and the public sector together in a neutral, non-hierarchical forum to exchange ideas concerning a particular aspect of the sustainable development challenge. Roundtables were seen as an experiment with new governance approaches and especially as a tool to break down the hard barriers between the sectors of society, to resolve conflicts that arose during SPCS implementation and to build broad support for the policy, regulatory and institutional changes necessary to implement the SPCS.

The uniqueness of the Roundtables lay in the fact that they were entirely neutral fora for discussion, often without a permanent chair or any recognition of traditional power or position.

Instead, Roundtable meetings were usually facilitated, on a rotating basis, by one of its members, and support between meetings was provided by a secretariat nominated by these same members.

It is important to note that the Roundtables are the subject of official “notification” by government. In other words, they have a formal mandate and authority devolved upon them by the government. Although the recommendations formulated by Roundtables are not binding, they nevertheless exert a certain moral pressure on decision-makers, especially when these decision-makers participate in the Roundtable process. Experience has shown that government representatives on Roundtables have in fact picked up on some suggestions and presented them to their departments.

The government seems to have generally accepted the Roundtables, although there was initial resistance to the concept of opening for wider participation what have traditionally been government functions. In particular, the issue of involving civil society in public decision-making has not been easy to accept in a culture of non-participation. Government resistance has gradually been overcome thanks to the generally positive experience with participatory development projects in the province, and thanks to the quality and relevance of the debates that the Roundtables have begun to generate. Now that Roundtables are a broadly-accepted norm in public decision-making in Sarhad, one of the next steps envisioned by the project is to hand over the organization and support for the Roundtables to a range of players beyond IUCN or the project. This has already happened in the case of the NGO Roundtable, and is an indicator of the success of the concept. It is also significant that the Roundtable concept has moved beyond Sarhad and has been adopted by both the Balochistan and Northern Areas Conservation Strategies. In these areas, government departments have set up Roundtables or interest groups which, in some cases, have continued beyond the IUCN support project’s lifetime. (See Annex VII for a list of the Roundtables.)

The Roundtable on Forestry is worthy of particular mention. It arose out of the new Forestry Act that emerged largely from the SPCS process, although the Act itself was drawn up under an ADB project. Although one of the first Roundtables to be conceived and proposed, it proved almost impossible to agree on setting it

up, especially since it was linked to the idea of an independent Forestry Commission. The Forestry Roundtable was entrusted, under the Act, to develop the criteria for Commission membership and to draw up a panel of candidates from which the Commission members would be selected. The Forest Department resisted what it perceived to be a serious threat to its authority, and received a boost from the military government, which proved to be cool to the idea of non-governmental membership on the Commission. Persistence, the interest of the stakeholders evident from the public consultations and the political authority of the SPCS itself have, however, paid off. The Forestry Commission has been notified, although it appears to have been slow to begin functioning.

Other interesting Roundtables have been those established in Abbottabad and Chitral not around a sectoral topic, but as broad fora examining all sustainable development issues related to the district conservation strategies. In Chitral, the newly-elected district government (June 2001) decided to confer formal recognition to the Roundtable, and to use it as a mechanism for consultation and consensus building. The NGO Roundtable provides a forum for a wide range of NGOs to discuss their capacity-building initiatives related to SPCS implementation. It lapsed for a couple of years after the publication of the SPCS document, but was revived in December 1999 and now meets regularly. The Industries and Agriculture Roundtables are also very active: they are holding substantive debates and are backed by active secretariats.

Assessment

There is no doubt that the Roundtables have promoted interaction between government, business and civil society in relation to key matters of public policy. Traditionally, public sector decisions rested on the technical knowledge of a few officials and a strictly linear process internal to the government. The Roundtables have been critical in opening these decisions to public debate, and have improved the quality of decisions by broadening the knowledge base. They have also played an important role in refining the sector-specific recommendations generated by the SPCS project. Their potential as fora for consensus building and conflict resolution remain high, though inadequately explored.

However, many of the Roundtables have begun to flounder as the adoption of the SPCS fades into the ever-more-distant past. The Roundtables

on Communications, Environmental Education, and Cultural Heritage are dormant, while the one on NGOs has only recently been revived. The combined experience of Roundtables has resulted in little visible policy impact, apart from the Agriculture Roundtable's input into recent sector reforms. At the same time, they have not succeeded in consolidating experience and tools for consensus building and conflict resolution, as initially envisaged. Nor does there seem to be much progress in using the Roundtables as conduits for the capacity building required to implement the SPCS, as was originally intended. The Training Needs Assessment of the Roundtables has not been completed (with the partial exception of the NGO Roundtable) and virtually no progress has been made towards this end.

The experience has yielded valuable lessons for the project in its efforts to institutionalize the Roundtables in the province. For a start, it has become clear that the Roundtables need to be given a clearly defined role in the implementation of SPCS. Without this focus, most of the Roundtables have become inactive, while others are struggling. While promotion of SPCS as a brand name is not crucial, the agenda of the strategy needs to be closely linked to the Roundtables, and this has not always happened, for example, in the case of the NGOs. Similarly, the Roundtables need to meet more frequently and more regularly if a shared vision is to be developed and action plans formulated.

Most participants in the Roundtables feel that they are of enormous value in promoting inter-sectoral coordination, but that this advantage is limited by the quality of participation. The participants need to be adequate in number and representative in composition, and this has not always been the case: the Sustainable Industrial Development Roundtable, for example, initially had few private sector members. Even choosing from within the stakeholder groups has been problematic. This may be one reason for the lack of complete acceptance of Roundtables as tools for policy influence. Another has been the resistance from some within the government, who see the Roundtables as an infringement on their turf!

The message that comes through again and again in speaking of the Roundtables is that the success of these fora requires a clearly-defined and realistic agenda targeted at the policy level. Better communication of the Roundtable discussions at the appropriate level could also

produce better results. At the same time, the membership needs to be well chosen, with some committed leaders in each forum and active secretariat support.

The issue of leadership is critical, as the SPCS experience demonstrates that Roundtables are rarely self-propelled. They need catalysts to perform this role as a full-time function. Indeed, follow-up between meetings is crucial to the efficacy of the fora.

As a whole, however, the Roundtables have proved to be a useful and creative vehicle. They initially functioned extremely well, though they have tended later to flag, often failing to "take off" in the way expected. They did result in reinforcing the concept of participatory decision-making, but have been less successful in translating this into effective policy influence.

Catalyzing government action: Focal Points

The idea of Focal Points—mostly IUCN-recruited SPCS project staff placed within and with a mandate to liaise exclusively with key line departments in the provincial government—emerged in the first phase of the project. The Focal Points were envisioned as sectoral catalysts who could mobilize and support the Roundtables while at the same time introducing the SPCS agenda into the work and future planning of each department. In their support role for the respective Roundtables, the Focal Points were expected to ensure the effectiveness of these participatory fora and ensure adequate follow-up to the discussions and to any decisions taken.

The second objective for the Focal Points was to ensure that the SPCS agenda permeated the functioning of each department. This was to be achieved through working within the departments on a day-to-day basis. As it turned out, the Focal Points tended to become key players in bolstering capacity within their respective departments and in ensuring continuity, both in following up Roundtable discussions and in building SPCS recommendations into the work of their respective departments.

The Focal Points were hired and put in place in 1995. Initially, the question arose as to how extensively the system should be introduced—in PE&DD only, or in each department central to SPCS implementation. The latter choice proved to be a good one. From the outset, the Focal Points began to sensitize their host departments

to the SPCS recommendations, and proved a useful force in building the SPCS agenda into the work of their departments. More often than not, they took the lead in promoting SPCS implementation through the work of their departments.

In the SPCS implementation phase, as the project began to consider its hand-over strategy, the idea of Government Focal Points was introduced. The objective was to transfer the functions of the Focal Point to staff within the departments themselves. This was intended to overcome the problems faced by the Focal Points as sometimes unwanted outsiders, while reinforcing the sustainability of the SPCS and its impact. The choice of the officials to be named as government Focal Point was critical. They had to be senior officials, whose word would carry weight and influence, yet not be so senior as to be unreachable. The choice tended to rest on Chief Planning Officers and Additional Secretaries.

Assessment

The experience of the Focal Points has been mixed. Although their attachment to relevant departments was meant to set in place framework conditions for the implementation of SPCS, this appears to be realistic only over a long time frame. Further, for this to succeed, the Focal Points require strong process-oriented skills, such as catalyzing action and networking throughout the department. The active development of such skills has not been one of the project's strengths. Instead, success has tended to depend on the latent talent and professional growth of the individual Focal Points.

At the same time, the style and culture of the provincial government departments has proved relatively unresponsive to "outside" intervention, and the poor understanding on the part of some Focal Points on how government decision-making operates has sometimes limited their influence. Further, it proved difficult to recruit Focal Points with the full range of skills required in the departments where they would be placed. So the level of credibility and acceptance required for the mechanism to work could not always be achieved, making the task of "mainstreaming" the SPCS agenda more difficult.

There was always a danger that department heads would fail to respect the special status and functions of the Focal Points, instead diverting them onto a range of extraneous assignments.

This occurred in some cases. In other cases, the system has worked well, and the department heads have been recruited as strong supporters of the SPCS agenda. In any event, the Focal Point system was not designed for sustainability. The Focal Points were given a brief to assist with sectoral input to the SPCS, identify opportunities for SPCS implementation in their sectors, and help mainstream the SPCS agenda. After that, they were to hand over their duties and step down, or be absorbed by their respective departments. It was hoped that, if they had managed to demonstrate their usefulness, their functions (if not their posts) would be absorbed into the structure of the department.

The Focal Points helped to sharpen the focus on tangible outputs, such as facilitation of capacity building for the public sector, inter-departmental coordination, and support to the Roundtables. Their role in selecting trainees for non-SPCS training programmes such as those run by LEAD-Pakistan, and ensuring continuity of training has proved important. This has not, unfortunately, translated into significant policy influence, nor into significant improvement in the functioning of the respective departments. The extent to which success was achieved with the Focal Points is linked very closely to the relationship that the individual Focal Point managed to establish with his or her government counterparts. Although the Focal Point system proved cost-effective and the experience in the agriculture sector reforms has been particularly positive, it is hard to escape the feeling that the full potential of the system was never realized.

It is harder to evaluate the success of the government Focal Points, in part because they have tended to come on stream late in the period covered by this story, or even beyond it, and in part because it is not always easy to separate the person's SPCS-related responsibilities from the same person's established duties. It can be said, however, that the responsibilities involved in serving as a government Focal Point have tended to be added to the often very onerous duties already shouldered by that officer, and this has made it difficult, without additional capacity development and support, to fulfil these responsibilities optimally. A key indicator of success would be the assumption of responsibility for the Roundtables and for the follow-up of their recommendations by the government Focal Points and in this respect the track record has been patchy.

Capacity building

There is nothing more facile than to identify lack of capacity as a major obstacle to sustainable development, or indeed to any development, in Sarhad. The same statement would generally apply to any developing country or region. Helping to put in place the basic capacity for the development and implementation of the SPCS had to be one of the central challenges of the SPCS. At the same time, the SPCS project operated under the assumption that adequate progress could be made with existing institutions and human capacity while the process of strengthening that capacity unfolded. How justified was that assumption, and how strategically did the SPCS process address the capacity gaps?

The nature of these capacity gaps is not uniform. In civil society, the biggest problems are often of a “hardware” variety—securing financing, staff, infrastructure, etc. The public sector, on the other hand, must overcome a strong in-built inertia in the face of the need for change and reform, an absence of viable systems, a dearth of strategic thinking and lack of exposure to recent thinking on sustainable development issues. A common problem for both is the exaggerated reliance on individual personalities, and the corresponding weakness of systems, together with the overall lack of trained professionals. To make matters worse, funding to address these needs reduced to a trickle after May 1998, with Pakistan’s explosion of a nuclear device and the advent of a military government in 1999.

The institutional capacity issue is central. The leading environmental regulatory authority in the province, for example, is the Environmental Protection Agency, NWFP. The EPA was supposed to have 103 staff members by 1998, including 62 technical officers, according to a World Bank-funded environmental capacity strengthening project. Even late in the SPCS project, however, available funding supported only 40 staff, of whom only four were full-time technical professionals. Until 1999, the EPA did not even have a testing laboratory! Furthermore, it was supposed to be delegated regulatory powers in 1997 by the Pakistan Environmental Protection Act. In the event, the federal government delegated limited regulation and enforcement powers to the provincial government only in 1999, and the government has only recently assigned authority to the EPA. Principal responsibility for regulation and compliance still resides in the federal government. Such realities

have severely hampered the development of environmental regulation, a matter assigned high priority by the SPCS. Training a limited number of staff could not have reversed this situation.

The SPCS process contributed to capacity building in two broad ways: through the organization of specific training and familiarization events; and through the ongoing operation of the different mechanisms through which the strategy was developed and implemented: communications and awareness raising, public consultations, networking, Roundtables, internships, environmental awards, Focal Points, internal and external project reviews, and through providing access to IUCN’s capacity in Pakistan and worldwide.

While the SPCS support project aimed at building capacity from the outset (June 1992), efforts were consolidated only in the third phase. In the public sector, most of the efforts have been geared towards training. Of particular note is the custom-designed set of six training modules delivered by LEAD-Pakistan to 22 mid-level officials from different provincial departments. Participants were selected through a rigorous process that sought to identify those who would most likely be in a position to use the acquired skills. Unfortunately, intervention into the selection process by politicians and civil servants sometimes watered down the quality of the group chosen.

Other training courses in the private sector have been mostly sector-specific, for example in agriculture and forestry.

Some of the indirect capacity-building measures, on the other hand, have been more successful. Throughout the development and implementation of the SPCS, the staff of the support project and many of their counterparts in government travelled all around the province, participating in meetings, workshops and reviews, and using every opportunity to introduce or explain the SPCS and to seek the reaction of the audience to its approach and proposals.

An environmental awards scheme is proving to be a positive innovation in the third phase of the project, while the internship programme has been successful in infusing new thinking into government departments. Interns, largely recruited from universities in the province, were recruited and placed in the support project, the IUCN office, NGOs and government departments. Indeed, the advertisements led to a flood

of applications, and a large interview panel had to be set up to deal with the load. Many of the interns have gone on to join their host organization or have secured good jobs as a result of their experience, and many others have kept in close touch, forming a professional network of some influence. The interns placed with the government are particularly interesting. In most cases, it proved a shock to see in what conditions government is obliged to work, and has led to a healthy respect for those who, despite the odds, still try to accomplish something.

The interns were called together for monthly meetings, and this provided the material for many course corrections and generated a range of good ideas and recommendations to the project.

In civil society, the support project concentrated on networking and planning capacity. It organized training for numerous NGOs on strategic planning, and tried to facilitate the flow of information to civil society organizations, including the environmental journalists' network, by linking them to outside sources of information. The positive impact of these efforts has been tarnished by the general atmosphere of suspicion and wariness, sometimes lapsing into outright hostility, between government and NGOs, and by the structural problems faced by many NGOs. Most NGOs survive on project funding and voluntary effort only, and face enormous uncertainty about their future. The SPCS support project attempted to link them to donors, but with mixed results. It also focused on "greening" the portfolio of the larger NGO's active in Sarhad, such as Strengthening Participatory Organizations and the Sarhad Rural Support Corporation, as well as the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in Chitral. These are umbrella NGOs, and the project worked with them to achieve a multiplier effect of incorporating environmental priorities into their development agendas. The success of this approach was less than it might have been owing to the structural problems that affect all NGOs operating in the province, and because of the mindset of some of these NGOs, who remain unconvinced of the priority to be accorded to the environment. Some continue to think that the SPCS is "out of synch" with the province's real development needs. Others were affected by the movement towards religious extremism in the province and in neighbouring Afghanistan. See Annex VIII for information on key training events.

Assessment

The challenge of capacity building in Sarhad is awesome and the assumptions made about existing capacity were probably optimistic. Lack of adequate capacity bedevilled the SPCS process from the start, and continues to undermine the process of SPCS implementation. The capacity building conducted under the SPCS project has had limited impact. Probably the task was simply beyond what a project of the scale of SPCS could realistically accomplish.

One major problem lies in the fact that the capacity needed to develop and implement the SPCS is weak or missing right across the board, from government departments, through NGOs and community-based organizations, to the private sector. This called for a well-coordinated plan to ensure that all aspects of the capacity-building activities—whether direct or indirect—were mutually reinforcing. An extremely strong, clear and well-supported capacity-building strategy was the only hope to make a dent on the reality of capacity limitation in Sarhad.

The problem existed also with the SPCS support project. It proved difficult to recruit project staff with the right skill mix, as a result of which IUCN's capacity to provide leadership and to introduce a steady stream of fresh ideas to the process was limited. This should have been identified as a key priority early on, and a more concerted effort made to address it.

Without wishing to appear too critical, the SPCS capacity-building efforts, despite the high priority given to them, seem to have been a case of "too little, too late" and, to some extent, also too scattered. While a good deal of training was undertaken, this training was not always adequately targeted, nor adequately followed up. Nor was it reinforced through strategic use of the indirect methods for strengthening capacity.

As is so often the case, the conclusion about capacity building resides in a truism. Capacity building is a long-term priority that requires a strategic approach, persistence and continuity over time, and careful targeting. The delicate balance must be found between formal skill development and the many indirect ways in which capacity can be consolidated and supported. The capacity-building efforts of the SPCS project, while often successful, in aggregate were probably too dispersed and insufficiently strategic.

It also inevitably suffered from the stark realities of Sarhad and from the instability of its politics

and institutions during the 1990s, to the extent that the SPCS project's fundamental assumption, stated above, was sometimes in doubt. Any project will suffer from bad luck, and the SPCS had its share—of unhelpful counterparts, of rapid staff turnover, of political upheavals—and all of it helped to make the task of building capacity more difficult. Nevertheless, the massive effort put into capacity-building by the SPCS project will no doubt pay off in many ways, whether these were anticipated by the project or not.

Networks

When capacity is scarce, there are a number of ways to work around it, all based on making the best possible use of what capacity does exist, extending and targeting it where possible and avoiding wasteful or overlapping uses. One particularly useful tool, for capacity extension, awareness building and action coordination is the formation and use of networks. By bringing together people and organizations sharing similar interests and holding useful skills, a bridge can be built over gaps in capacity and impact achieved that would be inconceivable without the critical mass of interest and commitment that reside in the networks.

The SPCS project encouraged the formation of voluntary networks, many of them stemming from proposals made in the public consultations. The networks that were formed were, to the extent possible, actively supported and encouraged by the project and often given a specific role to play in the SPCS agenda. The reason for supporting and facilitating networks was twofold:

- to provide a platform for consultation, to organize substantive input into the strategy and disseminate information and build awareness of the SPCS during the design stage; and
- to advance the SPCS agenda during implementation.

The latter stemmed from the fundamental principle of the SPCS: the strategy must be owned by the people and institutions of the province, and requires concerted action across the sectors in society for effective implementation.

The SPCS team, along with the Communications Unit of IUCN Pakistan, assisted in the development of the Frontier Forum of Environmental Journalists (FFEJ). The well-established NGO Resource Centre in

Sindh collaborated with the SPCS project to found the Frontier Resource Centre (FRC), a service centre for NGOs and community-based organizations in Sarhad. The SPCS project itself helped to form the Sarhad NGO Ittehad (SNI), a representative body of NGOs and CBOs in the province. Over time, the SPCS project has also assisted institutions and individuals in the province to link with national networks, including the Pakistan Environment Assessment Association and the Pakistan Environment Lawyers' Association.

The experience of facilitating and working with networks has largely been positive. The project had to invest considerable time and effort in the facilitation process, and this investment has had to be maintained over time. This has involved helping networks and network-servicing organizations (such as FRC) to register, developing management systems and terms of reference, and leading strategic planning exercises. The project has also supported some network activities financially (particularly capacity building), and has provided a number of services in kind, for example offering space to hold meetings.

The project had actively mobilized the local press from the time of its Inception Report. When the Peshawar-based journalists decided to form a network, launched in September 1995, the project actively supported its development financially and programmatically. The project and IUCN helped FFEJ initially by supporting some activities, and later in its institutional development.

SNI was formed in a similar manner, when an NGO workshop was held as part of the public consultation process during the design phase. Close to 140 participants were invited to share their thoughts on the role of NGOs in SPCS implementation, what enabling conditions they would need from the government and how they might best be represented in the formulation of an NGO sub-strategy. The project then facilitated consensus building among the participants, leading to their designating representatives to the NGO Roundtable. The project also involved the emergent coalition, Sarhad NGO Ittehad in ongoing deliberations. The Ittehad now includes a substantial proportion of the NGOs and CBOs from all districts of the province and the tribal areas in a representative, federal structure. Right from the beginning, the project kept a distance from the day-to-day management decisions of the network, supplying information and other support on demand only.

The SPCS team actively pushed for the involvement of SNI as a central partner in decision-making regarding SPCS formulation, implementation and more generally in the sustainable development activities of the province. A watershed in the involvement of civil society in sustainable development decisions took place during the Forestry Sector reforms process facilitated by the project. The government not only involved SNI in taking decisions, it went so far as to enshrine in the Forestry Commission Act the right for stakeholders to identify a panel of potential Commission members, from which the government could constitute the Commission's final composition. See Annex IX for information on the structure and membership of Sarhad NGOs Ittehad

At the same time, the involvement of individuals and institutions in the networks helped to raise awareness of and a sense of ownership in the strategy. The Frontier Resource Centre, for example, and its clientele of hundreds of grassroots organizations, now actively base some of their interventions on the priorities of the SPCS.

The organizations involved also shared information about environmental issues in the province, and tracked the progress of SPCS implementation during their regular meetings. This sharing is empowering in its own right, and has been one of the strengths of the networks. Further, the activities of the networks have played an effective role in information dissemination. This has been one of the prime successes of the experience with networks. FFEJ, for example, has managed to infuse environmental reporting into the mainstream newspapers of the province, which were otherwise unlikely to have been so open to this "unconventional" news, though it depends on the enthusiasm of a small base of members. Similarly, the (admittedly few) newsletters of FFEJ and FRC have been widely disseminated, and have helped to raise awareness about environmental issues and the SPCS.

As noted above, the networks played an important role in capacity building. Particularly in its third phase—Partnerships for Sustainable Development—the project attempted to build the technical and institutional capacity of the networks. This has included proposal development and monitoring training in SNI and FFEJ, and linking the networks to international training opportunities. The project has also assisted the networks in their strategic planning, and has provided them a window onto related interests across the world. This has included linking FFEJ

with the Asia-Pacific Forum of Environment Journalists, providing a vehicle to strengthen the former's reach and effectiveness. At the same time, some of the networks have been frustrated at the SPCS project's limited ability to help civil society organizations with some of their urgent needs, such as funding, equipment and infrastructure.

Assessment

The results of the engagement have generally been positive in awareness raising, information dissemination and generating ownership of SPCS implementation in society. The project has learned, however, that progress is consistent only if there is continuous investment to facilitate networks and to give the occasional impetus to specific initiatives. If progress is good, then this investment can increasingly take the form of indirect capacity building and more networking.

The choice of members turned out to be another crucial factor. It was found that involving active and strategically-placed members made all the difference in performance. FFEJ's success, for example, has rested on the involvement of some dynamic members who are active journalists with mainstream newspapers. Similarly, SNI's agenda is given credibility and weight by the presence and leadership of some reputed figures in the NGO world.

A clear weakness in the engagement process has been the lack of private sector involvement in the networks. Although the private sector has been engaged through membership in the Roundtables, an inadequate effort was made to network interested private sector parties. This is due in large part to funding restrictions. SDC funds could not be channelled to private sector groups, nor even to cover travel costs for private sector representatives to attend meetings. A separate network, or a strong link with one of the existing ones, could have added value not only to the network itself but also to broadening the ownership of the SPCS agenda.

IUCN itself initially provided a wide range of valuable information on sustainable development to the networks, including access to materials, ideas and recommendations from other parts of the world. However, the momentum generated in the beginning has not been adequately maintained, and the dynamism and involvement of the networks has proved sub-optimal.

Demonstration projects

In terms of generating momentum for success, there is nothing like a concrete demonstration of progress. Everyone is naturally skeptical of planning and document preparation, and there is considerable cynicism at the impact that plans have on ground-level reality. From the moment SPCS was first proposed, there was pressure not only to analyze data and identify issues, but at the same time to begin addressing some of the province's most urgent environmental priorities. Indeed, there were those who felt the planning side was superfluous—there were so many urgent needs that it didn't really matter which was addressed. Any forward movement was welcome!

The initial SPCS team, with its strong composition of field-oriented professionals, was in natural sympathy with the call to supplement strategic planning with direct action. The initial planning workshop in January 1992 discussed the concern at the necessary time lag before the project would show visible results, and proposed an immediate initiative to address the polluted Kabul River (see Annex X). The team undertook an assessment of river pollution and sources and discovered that many of the problems were of a structural nature, and had to be addressed "upstream." Although this served as a clear demonstration of the reasons not to tackle the province's environmental problems piecemeal, the team's visible commitment to rolling up their sleeves and tackling real problems gave the project a boost in credibility and strengthened the team's determination to demonstrate early results even while the strategy was being formulated.

There were two ways to address this need. The first, favoured by the team, was to use the SPCS team to identify and spin off projects that might be undertaken within the SPCS or apart from it, by IUCN or by other actors. Indeed the initial notion of the two-track approach was just that—strategy development and project generation in parallel. And this approach can point to a number of achievements: projects generated by the SPCS or to which it contributed. The large-scale project on Environmental Rehabilitation in NWFP and Punjab (ERNP), the Mountain Areas Conservancy Project, several environmental legislation initiatives and the proposed Fund for Sustainable Development all stemmed in whole or in part from the SPCS team.

Nevertheless, the pressure grew to demonstrate concrete results within the SPCS project itself,

and to identify and fund specific demonstration activities on the ground. The provincial government invited its line departments to propose suitable sustainable development projects that it would fund from its own budget, and the SPCS support project did the same with the NGOs. Although the harvest was discouraging, the team and their government counterparts reviewed the applications and selected a short-list of projects (see Annex XI) that fit with the SPCS approach and which could be supported financially.

The initial determination, unfortunately, was lost in the blizzard of activity and commitment that fell upon the SPCS team as soon as it got started. The cycle of public consultations, in particular, absorbed the full resources of the project and more, and it began to lose the feeling of involvement and momentum in the immediate stage beyond SPCS formulation.

The demonstration projects next surfaced in the third phase of the project in 1998. Again, the idea was to demonstrate the value of the SPCS agenda by implementing some of the projects it outlined. The objective was not only to show results, but also to generate a multiplier effect, where other stakeholders would implement similar initiatives.

Assessment

To date the experience has proved disappointing. It has proved difficult to get the demonstration projects off the ground. Those proposed by the government departments became bogged down in the bureaucratic process of project review and approval, only to be shelved when the economy went into a tailspin. Those proposed by NGOs were, in general, simply not of a standard that permitted project funding to be allocated.

One modest achievement that can be pointed to is the acceptance of civil society involvement in the demonstration projects, with the presence of SNI on the demonstration projects committee.

District conservation strategies

The district conservation strategies are the next generation of the SPCS. They represent in some ways a compromise between the strategic planning approach and the urge to demonstrate results. They also represent an experiment in decentralization of the SPCS, and attempt to bring sustainable development decision-making closer to the people.

Two primary objectives were set out for the district strategies:

- to help SPCS become operational at the level where government planning is intended to turn into action; and
- to demonstrate an alternative way of planning for sustainable development at the planning level closest to people.

Initially, there was considerable debate within the project about the wisdom and utility of launching district conservation strategies, and in particular concerning the optimal point in the SPCS process at which to launch them. Many considered district strategies as the natural next step as the NCS was taken down from the federal, through the provincial, to the local level. The notion of district-level action began to generate greater interest as the national debate on decentralization and governance reform gathered momentum in Pakistan.

Initially, the plan was to launch district strategies in Chitral in the north, and Karak in the arid south of Sarhad. The former presented interesting features, in that it is far from the “centralized” planning and receives few benefits from the provincial budget. The latter, though not very far from the provincial capital Peshawar, nevertheless is extremely poor and suffers from severe environment and development challenges. In the end, Karak was dropped in favour of Abbottabad for three reasons. First, the absolute minimum capacity to conduct such a strategy in Karak could not be located. Indeed, a high proportion of the male population of the district works and lives in other parts of the country or abroad. Second, Abbottabad retains a strong natural resource base that is under threat, and is the home of other institutional reform projects. Finally, the interest of the Chief Minister, who hailed from the district, could not be ignored.

The Chitral district strategy began in mid-1997 and is now complete, while the Abbottabad strategy is well advanced. Both have followed a similar route to that of the SPCS, relying on extensive public consultations within the district on key sustainable development issues. The Chitral Conservation Strategy held 37 village consultations as well as broader consultations in every tehsil in the district. These consultations raised priority issues at the local level, and also generated a sense of ownership among the stakeholders. The challenge for the Chitral Conservation Strategy now is to build on this ownership as the strategy moves into implementation.

Two major innovations set the district conservation strategies apart from other development initiatives at the district level. First, they set up, and routinely involve, a large district Roundtable during formulation of the strategy. These Roundtables comprise major stakeholders in strategic planning for sustainable development (70 members in Chitral), including community members, NGOs, administration, politicians and the military. The experience has also been positive in that the Roundtables are unique forums at the district level for sharing experiences of development and current political trends. The meetings have, in fact, tended to turn into “accountability fora” for officials and for government actions. However, the size of the Roundtables, coupled by the difficulty of the terrain, has meant that they cannot meet often, and this has hindered significant input to strategy development.

The second positive innovation has been the idea of district funds for sustainable development. The idea is that all development money for the district should go to a central pool. Projects supported from this pool would require sanction resulting from discussions on the proposals by all major stakeholders. A transparent system of disbursement would serve greatly to strengthen accountability, but the proposal has yet to overcome resistance from government.

One problem that has emerged in examining the idea of a district fund, and indeed more generally in the district strategy process, is that the current practice is for pre-determined disbursements to come from provincial headquarters, and for no real planning to be done at the district level. The devolution of authority to district-level decision-making will not be easy, despite the fact that it responds to official public policy in Pakistan. The Chitral Conservation Strategy, at least, has made some inroads, by proposing 52 sustainable development projects to the provincial headquarters in Peshawar. Of these, 15 were included in the Annual Development Plan for 2000.

Assessment

One clear problem of perception in the district Roundtables relates to whether they are intended to replace government planning or to support it. The confusion has occasionally generated adverse reaction. Nevertheless, the government has generally been supportive of district Roundtables, largely thanks to supportive

Deputy Commissioners.⁷ Since the governance reform introduced by the military government, the Chitral Conservation Strategy has received a boost. Indeed, the new District Assembly has created a Standing Committee to oversee implementation of the strategy.

In a sense, the district conservation strategies anticipated the current trend of decentralization. The government thinking on the topic now offers an unparalleled opportunity to replicate the two pilot initiatives, and the model being presented is fully functional. However, the project has yet to be fully integrated with de facto decision-making in the province, and needs to convince the policy community before it can be universally accepted.

Final considerations on approaches and opportunities

The aim of the SPCS is both to influence policies in the province in favour of sustainable development, and to promote a more inclusive, participatory approach to policy-making in general. The SPCS can justifiably claim to have identified a range of ways in which public policy could be made more supportive of sustainable development in the province. There is general consensus among the stakeholders that the SPCS has accurately identified the most critical issues, and pinpointed the key priorities for their remedy. Further, the strategy gains immense legitimacy as a result of the massive and successful effort to involve the wide range of stakeholders in the province.

There are, of course, some problems in the design of the strategy. Ultimately, it is more of a menu than a practical planning tool. It needs to be accompanied by sustained and effective communications, engagement of policy-makers, and close cooperation with those designing development projects. It assumes a readiness for policy change that is not fully present in reality. At the same time, the prescriptions in the strategy are, of necessity, too vague and generic simply to be picked up and implemented, absent more specific guidelines for planners. This could be part of the reason for the fact that the SPCS is not widely used as a reference in provincial planning.

That said, the SPCS has achieved clear successes. Some projects recommended by the SPCS have

emerged in subsequent Annual Development Plans and, while some have been funded, others have been delayed or dropped owing to budgetary constraints, and the attendant priority given to ongoing projects.

One piece of high-quality work emerging from the SPCS process has been the provincial legislation for environmental protection. Unfortunately, this has never been enacted because the federal government promulgated national environmental legislation at the same time, and this has taken precedence in line with the Federal Constitution. As it turns out, this is only a partial setback, as the national law derived a great deal from the provincial one. Sarhad is ahead of other provinces in terms of government willingness to conform to environmental guidelines, and to subject project proposals to environmental review, but it is restrained by capacity limitations.

Another highlight of the SPCS support project has been the reform process in forestry and agriculture. The project played a major role in the establishment of a Forestry Commission and participatory mechanisms, while contributing to agriculture sector reforms called for in the SPCS.

Generating and institutionalizing broad-based participation has been a marked success of the SPCS project. Right through formulation and into implementation, the project has managed to infuse the concept of participation in official decision-making. The government has welcomed this shift, which has enhanced the quality of decision-making and improved the ownership of decisions. Naturally, SPCS was part of a larger national and international trend, and so cannot claim entire credit for this shift. However, the Roundtables notified by the government are completely SPCS-initiated mechanisms, and mark a significant change in the way in which government operates.

Reforming government and governance, however, is a larger agenda than notifying Roundtables or securing broad acceptance for public consultation. The SPCS support project has had to navigate a narrow path between trying to reform government and trying to replace it in some of its functions. The project has inherently realized that governance mechanisms need to change and has demonstrated some models, but this still awaits adequate translation into policy influence. In working with the government while try-

⁷ Note that the post of Deputy Commissioner has now been abolished.

ing to placate reaction spurred by perceived threats to power, the project has walked a tightrope. In the end, its ability to bring about a radical change in the way policies are made has been limited.

For example, engaging the PE&DD was a good choice, but constrained by the fact that it controls only the provincial fraction of the three per cent of national GDP devoted to “development.” Other sources of influence on the province’s sustainable development are much more important. It is questionable whether the project gave enough priority to understanding the diverse nature and roles of the different players in policy setting. The real policy process was never analyzed, and so it was not targeted effectively. The assumption that public opinion would guide strategic planning for development and build a strong momentum for change also turned out to be over-optimistic in the absence of functioning mechanisms for the exercise of accountability in decision-making.

Finally, the project undervalued the role of the private sector as a policy player. This neglected the growing international trend of shifting policy-making from the politicians or bureaucracy to the market. Various private sector actors and multilateral institutions are playing an increasing role in local policy setting, but the project did not interact with them very consistently.

Recent attempts to do so have had positive results, for example working with the Asian Development Bank to redirect a major development project in Sarhad, and with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization to set up a national Cleaner Production Centre in Peshawar.

Part of the reason for being unable to follow every lead and take advantage of every opportunity was the limited capacity in the SPCS team and the enormous workload imposed on it. It never really had the luxury to analyze the root causes of issues it wanted to address, such as bad governance, poverty and environmental degradation. This limited its capacity to address these fundamental issues at the policy level.

Another victim of the capacity gap was communication. It proved impossible to meet the demand to provide appropriate policy information at the right time to the right people. The SPCS itself was never re-packaged for different audiences, although this might have greatly increased its impact and dissemination. Indeed, publication and launch of the SPCS document was held hostage for almost two years by conflicts within the bureaucracy. Without this visibility in the policy community, the SPCS suffered from an inadequate profile, even as a broker of knowledge.

Photo: First phase consultations generated invaluable information and a "reality check" with the people of the province.



Section III: Finding the Balance

If any single lesson has been learned from experience with strategic planning over the past decades, it is that it will fail unless the process is capable of adapting to constant change. Indeed, it is prudent to assume at the outset that the prevailing conditions will not only have changed several times during the course of the project, but that they will have undergone sharp ups and downs, moments of euphoric advance and times of depressing reversal. Strategic planning is a challenge of political navigation. With the goal kept firmly in mind, the pilot must adapt to the winds and the tides, change tack, trim or increase sail, and ensure that the vessel moves toward the goal at whatever pace is most likely to get it there most surely.

If this is true generally, it is true in spades for Sarhad, a region not only beset with challenging development problems, but also buffeted by strong winds of change, with frequent political upheavals, and a geopolitical position that prevents it from sailing a placid course towards a sustainable future.

So the best course for the SPCS process was not necessarily the straightest. The provincial government and the project team faced the challenge of striking the balance between what ideals dictated, and what reality imposed. This challenge—to strike the right set of balances—is at the heart not only of strategic planning; it lies at the heart of development itself.

This section examines some of the areas where a judicious balance had to be sought, and assesses the SPCS process's success in finding the right balance. For it is, in a sense, the ways in which

the balances are struck, rather than technical content, that will eventually determine the success or failure of a strategy or plan.

Two basic dilemmas

Perhaps the most basic dilemma facing the SPCS project was that of *supporting government*

Box 3. The corruption factor.

No discussion of working with government can be complete—or completely honest—without naming the unnameable (or rarely named) reality of corruption. Corruption, graft and influence-peddling are common currency in Sarhad, and a nefarious force the SPCS initiative had to deal with on a daily basis.

This text speaks of the obstacles faced by the SPCS team—bureaucratic interference, clan-nishness, unexplained delays and non-cooperation. It must also mention that many of these problems were due to the decision by IUCN not to enter into the organizational ethos and culture of corruption. By refusing to indulge in pay-offs or nepotism, the SPCS paid a short-term price.

There can be little doubt, however, that there will be a long-term pay-off. And in any event, IUCN had no choice. If it was to introduce the new governance to Sarhad, it had to model its values and practices.

vs. pressing for reform. On the one hand, the SPCS was an initiative undertaken at the invitation of, through and by the provincial government. It quite naturally focused to a considerable extent on improving government planning, on strengthening government services in the environmental area and on rendering government more capable of fulfilling its formal functions. On the other hand, it is common knowledge that government is a considerable part of the problem, and not only because of limited capacity in the public sector. Indeed, it can be stated without undue cynicism that the reforms required to bring Sarhad—and indeed most other parts of Pakistan and the developing world—onto a path of sustainable development are predicated on a deep-reaching reform of government institutions and practices. So there could be legitimate grounds for doubt, if sustainable development is the objective, whether efforts to reform government practice might not end up reinforcing the very structures that compound unsustainable development practices, and which require fundamental rethinking.

There is room for an almost endless debate about how well this dilemma was resolved by the SPCS team. IUCN's approach was to use every possible tool to pressure government, first to respect the public trust, but also to consider and openly discuss far-reaching reforms. By monitoring government, sitting in its offices and looking over its shoulders, and by ensuring that government action in the environmental field was under constant scrutiny from the press, NGOs, donors, and environmental professionals, IUCN and the SPCS support project provided an incentive for government to approach its task with greater diligence than would be the expected norm, and to consider new approaches. It provided the very channels for transparency and accountability that are the foundation for all governance reform.

Further, the SPCS initiative often attracted and gave scope to the best and the brightest among government staff. It is a mistake to regard government—for all its inefficiency and *can't do* mentality—as homogenous. Government ranks also include officers who care deeply, who preserve a sense of integrity and motivation despite all odds, and who are well aware that deep reform is needed. The project tended to give these officers a positive outlet. It empowered them and gave scope for their creativity. And, it must be added, it sometimes deprived itself of potential allies on the inside by repeatedly

recruiting the better ones to the SPCS support project or to the IUCN country programme!

At the same time, SPCS would have achieved a very limited impact had its attention been confined to government. Instead, as we have seen, the SPCS process pioneered a range of innovative mechanisms that brought government into dialogue with business, NGOs, the media and village organizations. These mechanisms were in part a supplement to government authority—a form of capacity extension—but they were also in part a challenge to it. The Roundtables, the public consultations, the press and NGO networks, all began to offer alternative channels for the achievement of development objectives to those offered by government. While any new mechanism needs time to show its impact, the development of multiple fora for debate and action on environment and development issues may be one of the most lasting legacies of the SPCS. We should all hope this is so.

By working hand-in-hand with the provincial authorities, IUCN not only contributed to the government's own process of reform, it also secured the space and the legitimacy to experiment with a series of mechanisms that, in the long run, are intended as an alternative to the current overbearing presence of the bureaucracy. So IUCN's relations with the provincial government was supportive... and subtly subversive at the same time.

Was the right balance struck? Probably. There is no point in shooting for Utopia. Reform works better than revolution. There is no place to start from but here, and no time but now. We have to play with the cards we are dealt. If there are grounds for any criticism of the approach taken to strategy formulation, it is perhaps that it focused on the bureaucracy—and on a restricted set of bureaucrats—and somewhat neglected the political levels of government. While the civil service has, throughout Pakistan's more than 50 years as a nation, been the one element of continuity, it tends for that very reason to be a conservative force. Identifying the change agents among the provincial politicians might have been helpful at crucial times in the project's history (though it would have entailed added risks).

The second basic dilemma is that of depth versus coverage. Projects tend to be successful when they are sharply focused and take on a manageable set of challenges. Thus, initiating a strategy on women's education, or on protected areas, or

on soil erosion control, while still very much a challenge, nevertheless offers some semblance of feasibility. By contrast, sustainable development requires adjustments across the entire spectrum, from the policy, institutional and regulatory structures at the top, to land tenure conditions at the bottom; and from natural resource management on the one hand, through pollution and urbanization, to tax policy, literacy and the role of religious institutions in public life on the other. This dilemma of depth versus coverage is the source of constant debate in any strategic planning process: whether to focus on a narrower range of topics and increase the chances of achieving a lasting impact; or to aim broadly and avoid neglecting factors that affect sustainable development and which, if left out, could undermine the success of the process.

Characteristically, this proved an ongoing source of discussion throughout the project, even though the NCS set the tone with its broad reach and emphasis on process. A basic decision was taken from the start: whatever way the SPCS was marketed (see the following section) its reach had to extend well beyond the IUCN heartland of living natural resources management. Indeed, the framework of the SPCS had to range well beyond the environment field to embrace the full scope of the province's development challenges, even if the specific activities and recommendations focus more particularly on the environment. SPCS is a development strategy with strong roots in the bedrock of a healthy environment and a robust base of natural resources.

If there are grounds for regret, it is that this decision to cast the net wide was not accompanied by a sufficiently rigorous process of holding to the priorities that were set, or by a strict sequencing of key actions, so that early success in some areas would build momentum for implementation of the strategy as a whole. This enabled people—particularly within government—simply to pick and choose among the wide array of actions identified and to claim, while pursuing their narrow interests, to be contributing to the implementation of the strategy as a whole.

Managing the trademark

One of the clearest manifestations of the above dilemma is the near-constant, and apparently unavoidable, debate that took place around the appropriate title for the effort. PNCS is the Pakistan National Conservation Strategy and

the SPCS is its immediate heir. So the term “Conservation Strategy” reinforces the sense of lineage. SPCS aimed to achieve at the provincial level what the NCS achieved at the federal level. So retaining the title reinforced the sense of continuity.

At the same time, if the aim is conservation, why is the SPCS concerned with urban pollution, with governance reform and with women's education? The SPCS's government counterparts usually operate under an “Environment” label. Many of the key players work in Environment Sections or in Environmental Protection Agencies. The traditional Planning and Development Department became the Planning, Environment and Development Department thanks to the SPCS. Conservation tends to connote living natural resources and their management—broadly the concerns of the *green environment*. Environment includes the green environment, but ranges more broadly to cover pollution issues, urbanization and environmental quality. It includes the *brown environment* as well. Surely “environment” would have been a more accurate descriptor of the SPCS's scope?

But why stop there? Putting Sarhad's development on a sustainable footing requires much more than environmental action. It requires governance reform, capacity building, legislative development, attention to basic human needs and much more. What is really needed is what is termed *sustainable development*. Often dismissed by critics as being no more than “environment with frills,” in fact sustainable development is not simply broader in scope, it is fundamentally different from the notion of environmental protection. To be sustainable in the long run, development must be economically viable, socially equitable and environmentally sustainable.

Imagine three concentric circles. The inner circle is conservation, the middle circle is environment, and the outer circle is sustainable development. There is no reason for a strategy focused on the inner circle not to cast beyond its narrow borders to understand the broader context within which it must pursue its goals. An intelligent conservation strategy places itself within a broader framework of the interplay of forces that make up the development process.

In the end there were two principal reasons for the choice of title. First, whether it is a complete and adequate description of the scope of the strategy, the term *Sarhad Provincial Conservation*

Strategy ties the initiative to the NCS and, further back, to the World Conservation Strategy from which the approach originated. It is *thus a statement of pedigree*. Moreover, it clearly associates the initiative with IUCN, its approach, its philosophy and its style of action. IUCN has spent over 15 years nurturing its reputation in Pakistan, much of which rides on its programme and its conservation strategy approach. More than anything else, the term SPCS waves a particular flag.

The second reason is more subtle. Sustainable development, with its requirement for openness, participation and accountability, represents a threat to established order. Indeed, it is impossible to place development on a sustainable footing with the power structures, entrenched interests and mindsets largely prevalent in Sarhad today. Instead it requires the sort of change that calls every facet of existing development approaches into question. It is, not to put too fine a point on it, a fundamental challenge to the present reality. This is not true of the term *environment* and, even less so, of *conservation*.

The challenge to IUCN was to infiltrate the system and begin bringing about the process of change that will, with luck, favour the chances for a transition to sustainable development. Arriving with a battering ram to knock down the gates of the citadel would have guaranteed failure. Riding in on the more modest vehicle of conservation was not only less threatening, it enabled IUCN to make a start on the SPCS without awakening too much suspicion. After all, nobody can seriously question IUCN's green credentials. These are recognized worldwide; in Pakistan, when the SPCS was first mooted, IUCN had an established reputation, a permanent national presence, and the achievement of the NCS fresh in the public memory.

Yet the reason for adopting the non-threatening term *conservation* was not only tactical. The field of natural resources management, and especially forestry, has been a leading source of new ideas and of development experimentation in Sarhad, but also more generally. This is a paradox worth exploring. One would expect the impulse for development innovation to come principally from the social field, not from a field characterized by an almost military background—the tradition of foresters as rural police. Instead, forestry projects have introduced many of the basic ideas which the SPCS process was able to pick up and adapt, giving them wider currency and paving the way for their more widespread adoption.

Partly because of donor influence, but partly because they take place in remote rural areas far from the longing eye of the politician and the bureaucrat, forest and other natural resource management projects have introduced a range of tools—public consultation, collaborative management, community-based institutions and new roles for women—which, together, lay the foundation on which the new governance will eventually be built. Because they lie at the end of the subsidiarity chain, they are the mine from which the raw materials for bottom-up development may be drawn.

So IUCN's adoption of the vehicle of a conservation strategy was both strategic and tactical. And even where it still causes confusion, that very confusion can be taken as the starting point for discussion and debate.

Balances and compromises

As noted above, the challenge for the SPCS was to strike the optimal balance on the spectrum between the ideal and the realistic. Accepting too modest an assessment of what was doable would stifle the creativity needed for the SPCS genuinely to change reality. Aiming for too perfect an ideal, on the other hand, could condemn initiatives to failure where a more modest aim would at least have advanced sustainable development somewhat. These dilemmas, balances and compromises confront project managers every day. How they are juggled and matched with the prevailing climate, in the end, determines project outcomes. It is the difference between success and failure.

This section looks at a selection of these areas of necessary compromise, and offers some reflections on how well they were addressed in the various phases of the SPCS project.

a) *Participation*

Although it is ahead of the rest of the country in this respect, Sarhad does not have a culture of participation. If, at the local level, the *jirga* system is a fundamental feature of Pukhtoon culture, the provincial government and its representatives throughout the districts and tehsils are not known to be enamoured of public debate, nor of consultation. Yet the entire SPCS approach was based on developing and implementing mechanisms to allow broad input into the formulation of the strategy, and to hand over a considerable part of the implementation to groups outside the established structures of government.

Where this might have been expected to trigger a highly defensive reaction on the part of government, in fact it was accepted with considerable facility. How can this be explained?

First, Sarhad is a largely rural society, and the distance between the rulers and the ruled is not as great as it is elsewhere. Even senior civil servants are accessible in ways not common at the federal level or in some other provinces. Further not even the most conservative provincial bureaucrat could ignore the fact that the winds were shifting. Business as usual is no longer a very secure option. Experimentation, conducted under a project that is not perceived as a threat and which is ultimately under the authority of the government itself, can be a very positive way to approach and try out changes which will inevitably have to come.

Second, there are progressive elements throughout the provincial administration who welcomed the introduction or reinforcement of participatory approaches, both as a reality check and as a source of valuable new ideas.

Interestingly, the notion of according a greater role to NGOs was reluctantly welcomed by the authorities, although the relations between the two have not always been smooth. In Sarhad, as elsewhere, it is clear that the public sector does not have sufficient capacity to deliver urgent development benefits where they are most needed. Indeed, it is rapidly becoming evident that they never will have that capacity. The two most common approaches to dealing with this reality are capacity extension and devolution.

In the first, government seeks partners to help deliver development services. In many cases NGOs are well-placed to adopt this role, especially with respect to specific target groups in the population i.e., women, students and isolated communities. In the second, government devolves responsibilities once held centrally onto structures closer to the problems themselves, leading to the strengthening of village, tehsil and district institutions which take over the role once played by the provincial government itself.

In both cases, the SPCS was moving government onto fairly unfamiliar ground, and a great deal of goodwill and experimentation were needed. The participatory mechanisms pioneered by SPCS project—the Roundtables, the Village Consultations, the networking and capacity-building activities—all provided a rich foundation for exploring new and more flexible approaches. While some individuals predictably opposed the

opening of the debate and the central role given to structures outside government, this feature of the SPCS process was broadly accepted.

It is clear, with hindsight, that the participatory approaches were used more effectively to gather information and ideas than to design and implement solutions. The wave of consultations that characterized the data gathering and strategy formulation phases was—with exceptions—replaced by more opaque approaches in the later stages of the SPCS process. The feedback mechanisms needed to keep the stakeholders consistently involved in the strategic process were somewhat weak, with exceptions relating to the District Conservation Strategies in Chitral and Abbottabad, and to some extent to the operation of the Roundtables and other networking mechanisms established by the project.

At the same time, in respect of its use of participatory mechanisms, the SPCS process clearly set a trend in motion. There are few major projects conducted in Sarhad today that do not build these approaches into their design and implementation.

b) Public (dis-)service

The basic dilemma of supporting versus undermining government was presented above. It concluded that IUCN had struck a clever balance by capturing government as a partner while putting in place processes that would accelerate badly needed governance reform. Beyond the basic issue, however, there were other balances to be struck.

IUCN, whether by default or as the result of careful analysis, accepted that its principal partner must be the provincial government. While this is a logical decision on one level (after all, what were the alternatives?), it might have merited more profound analysis. The decision to focus the change process essentially on public service structures, and in particular on the provincial government's planning division, rested on two questionable assumptions.

The first assumption is that development planning in Sarhad is based on an objective and even-handed assessment of priority needs, and that it in some way translates the popular will. In fact the projects that make it into the Annual Development Plans, that proceed to planning permission and that are presented to donors, have little to do with objective priority assessment and more with the interests of an established coalition of the bureaucracy, provincial and local politicians, and contractors.

The second assumption is that there is a direct link between what is included in the development plans and what takes place on the ground—that the planning process measurably affects ground reality. In fact, experience shows that there is no significant and direct link between the plans and the ground truth.

Thus IUCN, in placing key emphasis on the bureaucratic route, established a process predicated on bureaucratic support. Yet using the bureaucracy to change the policy framework is an uphill challenge. Bureaucracies traditionally *want* politicians to depend on them. As noted above, IUCN did not invest uniquely in the public sector, and was well aware of its limitations. And it hedged what it did invest heavily through support to alternative structures. This is always the most difficult balance to strike, and opinions remain divided on how well the SPCS team achieved its purpose in this respect.

It must also be remembered that the emphasis on government was inherent in the nature of the funding for the process. The principal funding support came from the Swiss government, and this was from their bilateral aid programme. This funding would not have been available had the provincial government not been the principal partner. In the event, the donor gave IUCN a great deal of latitude in exploring non-governmental channels.

Finally it should be added that the provincial government also made clever use of the SPCS process. When it suited them, they were quick to roll out the SPCS and take credit for its achievements, its experimentation and its innovative character. When it got in the way of their interests, they were quick to ignore or criticize it.

c) *Supply and demand*

Striking the balance between supply and demand, between leadership and engagement, or between bottom-up and top-down, is one of the greatest challenges of any development agent. While it is now well-established that development doesn't *take* without significant—even defining—input from those most directly affected, it is foolish for those with ideas and experience not to contribute these to the process. Simply adopting a listening mode is not ideal, in particular when dealing with entrenched interests with no desire for change.

The SPCS project invested heavily in the process of problem identification, dialogue and consultation. Further, unlike too many similar projects, it

took on board what came out of these processes. The Inception Report—which represented the project team's considered assessment of where priorities lay—went through substantial modification as a result of the district and village consultations. It is indeed fascinating and commendable that the Inception Report—based on the experience and insights of a team of highly-qualified environmental professionals and on a thorough analysis of data—underwent such fundamental modification in light of the perspectives emerging from the consultations. It was, perhaps, the best possible illustration of the difference between an environment focus and a focus on sustainable development, and speaks well for the openness and intellectual honesty of the SPCS team.

At the same time, IUCN did not shy away from feeding its accumulated experience from Pakistan and elsewhere into the different stages of the discussion. Not to do so would have been irresponsible.

d) *Basic human needs*

So the balance between talking and listening was well struck. But listening posed another dilemma—one central to the challenge of sustainable development. The village consultations set the tone, but the message was not substantially different when women's groups, media representatives or resource users' groups were consulted. When asked about their environmental priorities, the response was a long menu of development needs—some, like clean water, immediately linked to the environment; others, like education, indirectly so; and still others, like employment opportunities, bore no obvious link at all to the core challenge of the project.

One response would have been to apply environmental filters to the raw material gleaned from the consultative process, selecting for those messages with a clear environmental content. To its credit, the SPCS team did not do that. Because, behind what they were hearing was the central message of sustainable development: there can be no environmental security without equity, justice and a threshold level of human well-being. SPCS shouted *environment*, and the echo came back *development (and good governance, equity, justice, etc.!).*

This reality, perhaps more than any strategic consideration, dictated the character of the SPCS in two ways. First, it underlined how closely the prospects for environmental sustainability are tied to offering populations a share in

the benefits of development, and to meeting their basic needs. Second, it emphasized the value of listening to, and learning from, the intended beneficiaries of the SPCS. There can be few more salutary lessons than comparing what people request, and listening to their elected representatives interpret these needs. If there is one justification for the subsidiarity principle, it can be found here!

e) *Incentives and disincentives: the compliance debate*

A common—and often snide—comment about policy projects in general, and strategic planning projects in particular, is that they rarely change the reality on the ground. This is a justifiable criticism, and one that is familiar to the planning community. The best way to counter the criticism is to build into the design of the projects the instruments that will serve to ensure that it has a real impact.

In earlier days, such instruments would have been focused around a regulatory approach, strongly rooted in government implementation. To have taken that approach in Sarhad would have been foolish. The public service is being dismantled or starved of personnel and resources, and the prospects for reversal of that trend are not good. Indeed, further shrinkage appears very likely. And even where the government capacity is in place, implementation of decisions and directives, and compliance with laws and regulations, cannot be guaranteed. In fact, giving public servants implementation authority, or the power to levy fines, is an invitation to corruption in a country already familiar with that dismal reality.

While some of what must be done to address Sarhad's sustainability challenges will require both hard (laws, regulations, enforcement) and soft (standards, licences) regulatory instruments, a balance must be struck between these and the range of economic tools which provide incentives for desirable behaviour, and disincentives to behaviour that is undesirable.

The SPCS team approached the latter challenge along three routes: the first and most important was to insist everywhere on processes that are open, transparent and participatory. When action is taken under the wary eye of the public, abuse is less easy and therefore less widespread. Openness and transparency lead to a rising demand for accountability, and participation leads to empowerment and to the habit of involvement, a habit hard to break once established.

The second was to institutionalize many of the fora through which this accountability could be exercised. The Frontier Forum of Environmental Journalists provides a window to the public for the good and bad measures taken pursuant to the SPCS. The Sarhad NGO Ittehad networked NGOs with community-based organizations throughout the province, setting in place a potentially powerful mechanism for bringing abuses of power, or non-compliance, to public attention. And the (intended) institutionalization of the various Roundtables will balance government influence with strong input from the private sector and civil society.

The third was to pursue a combination of regulation and incentive. The SPCS project supported and further developed legislation designed to set in place innovative institutional mechanisms—e.g., the Forest Commission. They also designed new ones—e.g., the mechanisms envisaged under the (ultimately unsuccessful) Good Governance Act, and others that would offer a range of incentives to good sustainable development practice.

Many of the broad range of possible incentive and disincentive measures used elsewhere in the world—taxation, licencing, performance bonds, etc.—are new to the Pakistan scene and certainly untried in Sarhad. The SPCS team made a start with exploring these. They did not get very far. Nevertheless, given the incipient nature of the debate in Pakistan and, indeed, worldwide, the balance struck was satisfactory.

f) *Policy vs. action: the upstream-downstream debate*

A more problematic balance to strike is between policy interventions and action on the ground. The first can address a wide range of problems with a relatively small effort, but it may deal with these issues superficially, and there may be a long lag time between policy formulation and ground impact. The latter addresses a relatively narrow set of problems, but often do so more thoroughly and the impact is more immediate.

This debate is perpetual—is it better to bring about substantial improvements in 10 villages or marginal improvements in 1000? There is no objective answer to this question, and much depends on the inclination of those involved. In an ambitious enterprise such as SPCS, it is possible to do both—at least to some extent. How did it fare?

First, it suffered from IUCN's general discomfort with policy interventions. In the Union, the

field habit runs deep; the urgency of the problems, and the skepticism of NGOs and communities waiting to see real results, all favour the specific and the short-term. And, as noted above, IUCN's credibility depended to a considerable extent on showing that it could make a difference in terms of the immediate problems that people face. At the same time, there is a lingering sense that IUCN should have been bombarding the bureaucrats and politicians with policy ideas, policy proposals and new initiatives.

Having worked at the ground level to understand the nature of the challenges and determined that they were deeply rooted in the structure of and approach to development, more attention might have been paid to the policy tools that could help turn the situation around. It would not be surprising if, several years from now, it is found that it is the policy and institutional recommendations of the SPCS—e.g., the establishment of the Forestry Commission or the good governance provisions—that have contributed most significantly to change.

The SPCS suffers from a general absence of comprehensive and compelling benchmarks against which to measure success. This is to some extent due to a consistent resistance to benchmarking by the bureaucracy, indeed, benchmarking serves to underline how bad things really are. It also suffered from a lack of acuity in its policy provisions—a sure test of IUCN's inexperience with policy. The policy recommendations (with some exceptions), especially in the area of economic and fiscal instruments, remain vague.

g) Personalities vs. institutions

The civil service in Sarhad has, since the SPCS process began, gone into a state of serious deterioration. Starved of funds and personnel, and with dwindling public standing and support, and insecurity about its own future, and under pressure from above and below, it presents a spectacle of disillusionment and pessimism. It is not that the bureaucracy is devoid of talent and dynamism. The civil service continues to attract some of the best talent in Pakistan. But it is well known that institutions go through cycles of growth and of decay, and the Sarhad civil service is in the latter phase of the cycle.

Faced with these circumstances, it is natural to seek out the leaders, the dependable officers, and focus attention on them. Natural, maybe, but

not always wise. A strategy, by definition, aims at longer-term change, and identifies policy proposals that require robust institutions to implement. Strategies should therefore lean towards institutional rather than individual approaches. Indeed, the field of development is littered with the bones of projects that thrived when under the benevolent wing of a local power broker, but which were rapidly discarded when the winds changed.

It is not possible to advance in any field in Pakistan—and in that respect as much in Sarhad as elsewhere—without seeking the support and protection of the currently influential, to rely heavily on the genuine commitment of certain individuals, and to use personal or institutional goodwill to secure protection from more malevolent forces, to lift obstacles to progress, and to influence those higher still. Where institutions are weak, the importance of individuals becomes correspondingly greater.

There can be no doubt that SPCS enjoyed strong support from Khalid Aziz in the early days. However, there can equally be no doubt that the project spent a good deal of energy struggling against powerful individuals whose personal political ambitions were not served by a successful SPCS.

Any project must develop skill at *egosystem management*, and IUCN has had occasion over the years to hone these skills into a fine art. It has done so, however, while retaining a healthy eye on the longer term, and a strong commitment to institutional reform and reinforcement. While the balance between attention to key individuals and institutions went through constant and rapid evolution throughout the life of the project, it can be said that IUCN found a fully defensible compromise between the two.

h) Compiling vs. raising awareness

The SPCS support project gathered an enormous amount of data in the course of its years of work. Some of this was fundamental to understanding the nature and opportunities of development; some was potentially explosive; almost all of it was useful and interesting. Two mutually supportive options are available for dealing with the mass of data that was assembled:

- turning it into the building bricks of new policy, academic understanding, or action proposals, and
- using it to fuel the demand for change.

Focus on the first leads to a more structured, robust strategy, while focus on the second leads to heightened awareness. The first puts faith in the current power-holders, the second on mobilizing public pressure for change. Ideally, the two must proceed hand-in-hand.

The SPCS process placed unusually high priority on public awareness, principally through the mechanisms for public consultation and debate described above. In development terms, the participatory approach is often its own reward: by articulating their needs and aspirations publicly, people validate their own aims, and receive important community endorsement for them, especially when they are widely shared. These same needs, fed upwards from the village and district level into development planning and priority setting at the provincial level, also provide the raw information for public awareness, thus gaining in political influence. When used as the basis for policy proposals aimed at the government, the priorities identified through these participatory processes can provide an important counterbalance for the individual and commercial interests with which decision-makers are beset.

But it is not enough to feed ideas and needs into the planning process, it is important to use public mobilization to ensure that they emerge as priorities, secure funding allocation and are diligently implemented. IUCN and the SPCS project seem to have been less successful in using communications, awareness and public mobilization at the output level than at the input level, although the restricted size of the support project imposed its limitations. The communications support to the project appears to have been too inconsistent, inadequately prioritized, overly concentrated on one-off activities and insufficiently strategic in identifying the key target audiences and reaching them with well-tailored messages. It also seems to have missed opportunities, such as reaching local radio, and the influence network that the religious networks represent. Not enough attention was paid to the madrassas and to the maulvis who, traditionally, are hostile to the redistribution of power that sustainable development demands. An important source of public influence may have been missed.

This section has explored the navigation challenges that any strategic planning process must face, the more so in a place like Sarhad where the impediments to sustainable development are so

overwhelming. It has tried to demonstrate that a broad-based strategy such as the SPCS must contend with a very wide range of variables, and must retain the flexibility to adapt to change and to feedback on a constant basis. It is inevitably affected by fluctuations in the economy, the rise and fall of political parties, the arrival and departure of key individuals, by good and bad luck, and by factors beyond the province whose reverberations inevitably reach it.

Choices, course corrections, re-evaluations and new initiatives must be decided every day, often on the basis of incomplete information. And the circumstances under which the decisions are taken are never ideal. Initiatives like the SPCS are always under-funded, confined to tight time frames, subject to often time-consuming review and reporting requirements and they face an enormous challenge recruiting staff with the requisite skills and experience. Project staff are always called upon to undertake tasks that do not respond directly to the priority needs of the project. Decisions are too often delayed, funding allocations are uncertain, the pressure to demonstrate clear outcomes is high, and progress may be blocked for months by a single bureaucrat whose interests have been thwarted or whose pride may have been hurt.

All of these are the daily reality in strategic planning, and the daily challenge of the project team. There is nothing more facile than to look back and dream up a thousand things that, with eagle-eyed hindsight, the project team might have done better, and this section sometimes succumbs to that temptation. But any criticism must be couched in a healthy respect for the nature of the challenge, and for the constraints under which the project operated. The extent to which the SPCS team and its supporters—inside and outside government—got things right is truly impressive, and is a tribute to their skill, persistence and commitment to the project's goals. That they did not get everything right was inevitable. It is simply hoped that the identification of some of the project's oversights, wrong turns or instances of bad luck will help others who venture down the path to sustainable development to do better—if circumstances allow them the luxury.

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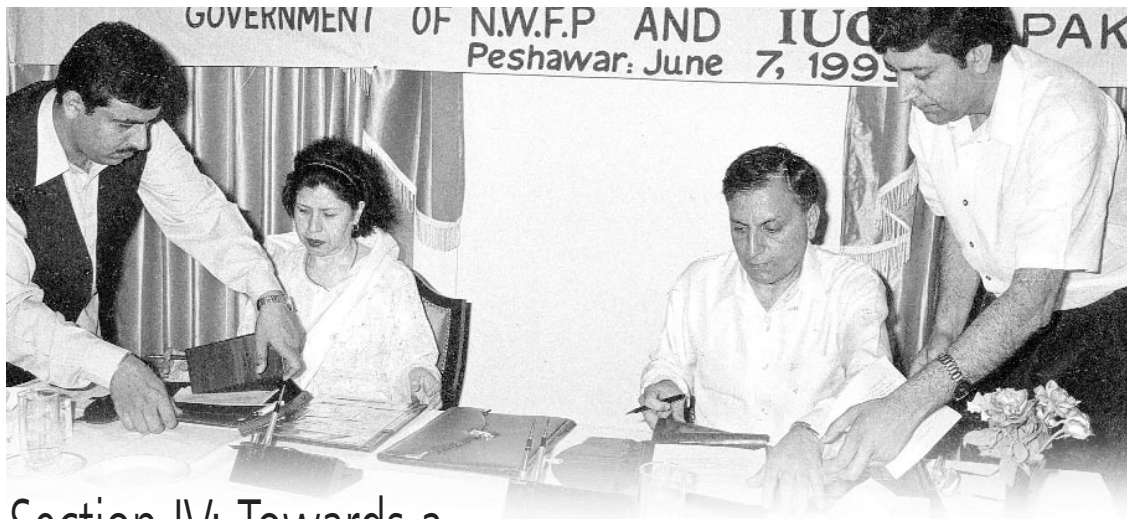


Photo: Signing ceremony of the MoU for SPCS between the government of N.W.F.P. and IUCN at Peshawar.

Section IV: Towards a New Governance – The SPCS and the Wider World

This has been the story of the SPCS, an initiative that unfolded in a particular part of the world at a particular moment in human history. The approach taken; the problems confronted; the personalities who emerged, played their role and then left the stage—all of these are particular to Sarhad in the last decade of the twentieth century. The experiences lived and the observations made might not apply to another province of Pakistan, much less another country. And what the SPCS team encountered in the 1990s they would not have encountered 10 or 20 years earlier, and might not encounter 20 years from now.

So the SPCS has been a unique experiment in space and time. But nothing takes place in isolation. Sarhad's history has been deeply marked by the past and present wars in Afghanistan and the vast movement of refugees into the province. These wars have much to do with the geopolitical struggles of the great powers, and they are tied to the situation in Iran and Central Asia. Sarhad's economy and society has been deeply affected by the movement of adult males from rural areas to work in the Gulf and elsewhere, with all the implications of that movement for openness to ideas and the influx of technology. Pakistan, itself, has fared badly in the competition for a place in the global economy, and the price it is paying in terms of economic hardship and foreclosed options reverberates strongly in the province.

It might have been interesting for the SPCS project to undertake a study, early on, of the broader changes in society, technology, economic management and governance that are beginning to sweep the entire world, and which cannot help affecting Pakistan as well. Such a study would surely have underlined the need for a strong focus on the context, on institutions and on policy, in which the SPCS's achievements remained modest.

Not all the changes are dire for the province. Indeed, it will be argued below that the global changes observed in the past decade may be confusing, they may in some ways be disconcerting, and they may carry a heavy short-term price in some areas. However, they also carry the seeds of hope for the province, and offer the best chance for the SPCS to achieve its overall goal of sustainable development.

The new debate

What are the grounds for this optimism, when all the development and environment indicators in the province are pointing floorwards? It is simply that we appear to be in one of those times in history when all assumptions are questioned and when the most creative efforts are dedicated to discerning the shape and content of the new reality that will eventually replace this one.

The media is full of the potential for the Internet, of the possibilities opened by free trade, easy access to investment capital or the latest technology. Others wax lyrical about the end of the nation state, the breakdown of the old order based on land ownership and military power. Many see in the end of the Cold War the first pale rays of the new dawn. Without gazing too deeply into the proverbial crystal ball, it is nevertheless possible to discern a number of now well-established trends.

Perhaps most interesting, at the international level, is the questioning of the Washington Consensus, and the alternatives being offered up by the major elements of the social and environmental movements. The Washington Consensus insisted that developing countries should open their markets to trade, investment and short-term capital as quickly and as fully as possible. Although in the short-term this would cause some problems, the markets would inevitably find the right equilibrium and prosperity would soon follow. A rising tide, as the saying went, floats all boats.

This formula is now crumbling before our eyes. While liberalization did lead to economic growth, that growth was too often achieved at the price of severe social dislocation, deepening inequities and environmental destruction. It has led to a backlash whose full weight is only now being felt, with the derailing of the negotiations for a Multilateral Agreement on Investment, with the failure of the WTO ministerial conference in Seattle and its aftermath, and with the street protests that now routinely accompany the meetings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

But these are only the outside manifestations of a much deeper shift. That shift is redefining our notion of democracy, and what it means in practice.

Redefining democracy

If there is one characteristic of the new paradigm that describes it well, it is the rethinking of democracy—of the way in which decisions have been made. In this respect, there has been an extraordinary evolution in the past decade, an evolution that will fundamentally change the SPCS's prospects for eventual success.

This evolution is all the more powerful because it reflects the convergence of three broad movements: the human rights, development and envi-

ronmental movements. In the field of human rights, the momentum has shifted away from pressuring governments to respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is focusing instead on how individuals or communities may best ensure that they have a voice in matters that affect them that is commensurate with their legitimate interests. The development movement has shifted away from the Right to Development notions of the 1980s and the earlier New International Economic Order to focus on fundamental freedoms as the necessary and unavoidable foundation for successful development, as eloquently expressed in Amartya Sen's *Development as Freedom*.

The environment movement has perhaps been slowest to recognize the changes that are coming and to understand their significance. But there is an ever-clearer understanding that environmental sustainability is not possible in a situation of gross injustice or inequity, nor in a situation of grinding poverty, nor in a situation where citizens have little or no say over the way their resources are managed. In short, the key to sustainability is to be found in human rights and in the freedoms necessary to develop. We have always known that development is not sustainable if it oversteps the limit imposed on it by natural systems. We are now learning that neither development nor environmental sustainability is possible in the absence of a basic framework of rights and responsibilities. And those rights and responsibilities are best exercised by allowing those who hold the rights and bear the responsibilities to participate in decisions that affect them.

Recasting decision-making

There is a basic truth in public policy: an open and inclusive process will result in more effective policy. Decisions that involve those affected will be better decisions. In development, chances for success and sustainability can be greatly improved through decision-making that is transparent, participatory and accountable. Decisions based on an open assessment of development needs, of the options to meet those needs, and of the optimal balance between the genuine interests at stake, will be better decisions—the cost of failure will be reduced, the cost of conflict more often avoided, and the full weight of human ingenuity mobilized behind a shared development goal.

There is no surer way of advancing sustainable development than by allowing the stakeholders

in any situation to participate fully in decisions affecting them. This in turn requires an honest identification of interests, of the rights attendant upon them, and of the information required to weigh the options judiciously. It requires mechanisms to ensure the full and informed prior consent of those associated with decisions. And it requires mechanisms for recourse in the case agreements are not implemented in good faith.

The new governance

The attraction of this Rights and Responsibilities approach to development is that it is comparatively simple. Development is no longer the exclusive domain of economists, engineers and planners. It is no longer something to be undertaken on trust by elected representatives. It becomes everyone's business.

The same three elements underlie human rights, social and economic development, and sustainability: transparency, participation and accountability. If transparency and participation are respected, they confer legitimacy on decisions. If accountability is respected, it leads to the rule of law.

Pakistan cannot long ignore the pressure of this transformation. While some may attribute less lofty motives to it, the current government has acknowledged parts of this new reality in its efforts to devolve power and to root out certain forms of corruption. There is still a very long way to go.

The SPCS as pioneer

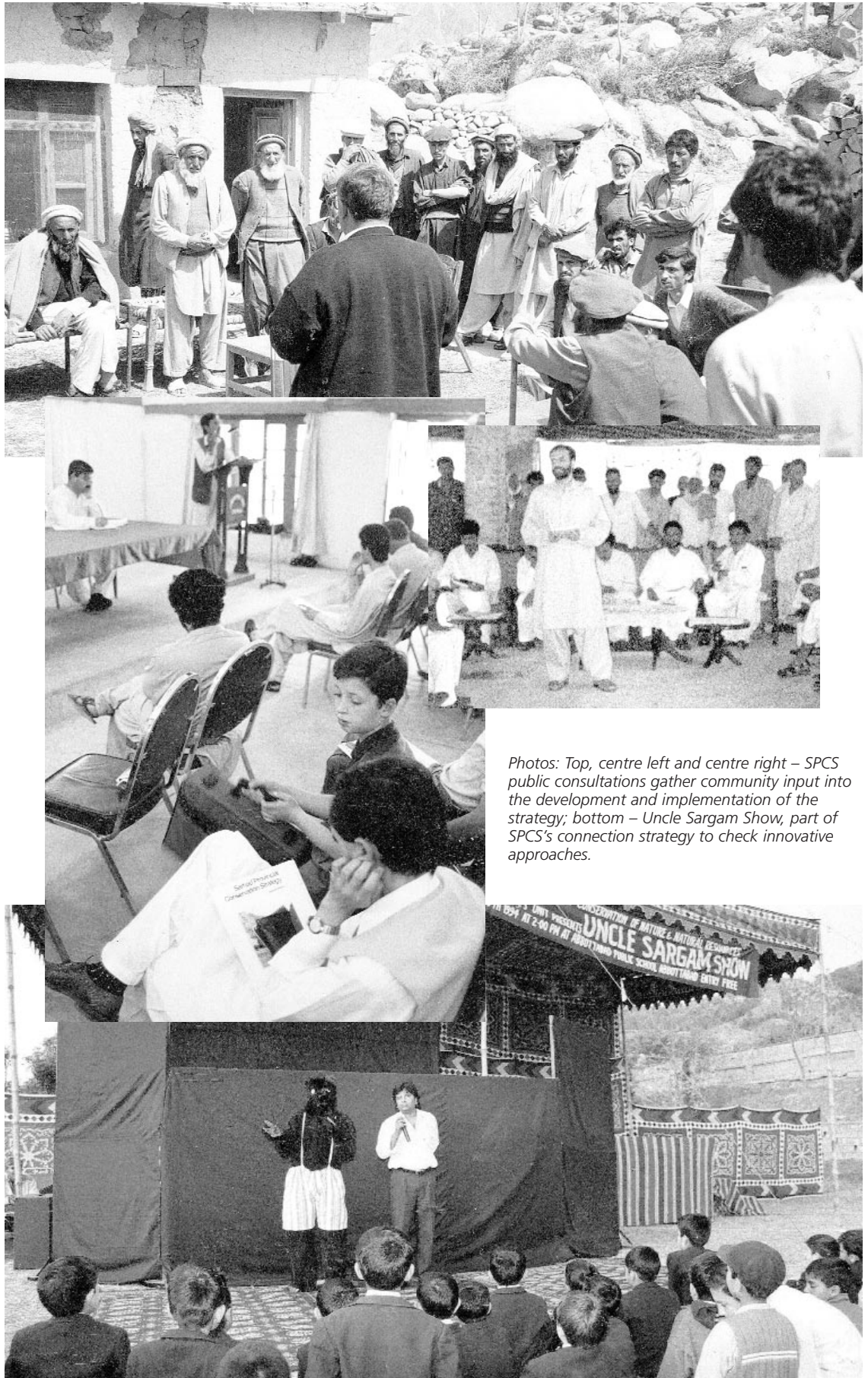
Why this description of the emerging development paradigm? Simply because the SPCS, in its own way, has served as an important vehicle to introduce and test this new paradigm in the province. Seen from a perspective of a few years, it is clear that the SPCS process served—to the extent it had the scope to do so—as a laboratory for the new governance, often many years ahead of its time. The SPCS team introduced and relied heavily on village consultations, and on other mechanisms to understand the priority needs of people and communities. It experimented with Roundtables, formal networks and other institutional mechanisms to enable participation of stakeholders in reviewing options and in some cases taking decisions that affected their rights. It began the first serious effort in the province to imagine an approach to development that did not depend entirely on currying favour with an entrenched bureaucracy. And it made enormous

efforts to provide the information base for improved decision-making. SPCS is, to an extent, a manifestation of the new paradigm.

Like many of IUCN's initiatives in Pakistan and globally, the SPCS was ahead of its time. This is as it should be. The role and value of organizations like IUCN is to introduce new ideas, new thinking, new approaches and new tools. It is to scan the field for ideas and practices that have been tried to advantage in other settings, and to introduce them where they might serve. It is to build the bridges, make the connections, and open the channels that will stimulate the imagination and reinforce the notion that positive and lasting change is, after all, possible. The status quo can perfectly well be tended by existing structures; it is development actors like IUCN that are needed to challenge it and to build support for its replacement.

SPCS was an ambitious venture in a situation where only risky strategies could hope to bring about the needed change. It has had its share of successes and failures, and in many cases, it is too early to gauge its full impact. What is important is to continue treating SPCS and its successors as living, growing and evolving processes, to persist in keeping SPCS present and in the public eye, to monitor advances towards its implementation, and to build public pressure to keep up the momentum it has generated. It is critical to seek and exploit all opportunities to introduce or reinforce the mechanisms for transparency, participation and accountability in development, from the local to the provincial levels, and to ensure that the new approach to decision-making becomes entrenched.

If this happens, and the movement towards a new approach to governance continues its slow but inexorable advance, prospects for the faithful implementation of the SPCS will continue to improve. It would not be surprising if, years from now, the SPCS is remembered not for identifying the sustainable development priorities of the province, not for the quality of its technical content or the value of the document, and not because of its heroic effort to bring together the many stakeholders to strive for a safer and more productive future. It may instead be remembered for introducing to the province the new paradigm, for introducing and promoting a new approach to governance, characterized by openness and participation, and by an approach to decision-making that truly addresses the sustainable development needs of the province and the people of Sarhad.



Photos: Top, centre left and centre right – SPCS public consultations gather community input into the development and implementation of the strategy; bottom – Uncle Sargam Show, part of SPCS's connection strategy to check innovative approaches.

Annex I

SPCS Reviews/Evaluation

• IUCN-SDC Review of SPCS – I	April 1994	Moving the Frontier: The Story of the Sarhad Provincial Conservation Strategy
• Mid-Term Review of SPCS – II	March 1997	
• Planning and Assessment Mission for SPCS III	March 1998	
• Mid-Term Review of SPCS III	March 2000	
• Planning and Assessment Mission for SPCS IV	March 2001	
• PSDN Studies (Evaluation of various SPCS mechanisms/processes)	February 2001	
(1) Roundtable-Focal Points-Government Focal Points		
(3) Capacity Development		
(4) Demo Projects		
(5) Awareness and Advocacy		
(6) District Strategies		
(7) Integration of Environment into Development		
(8) Gender Integration		
(9) Networking and Facilitation		

Annex II

Project Managers – SPCS

Name	Duration	Designation
1. G.M. Khattak	December 1992 to March 1994	Program Director
2. Mohammad Rafiq	January 1994 to April 1994	Deputy Program Director
3. Mohammad Rafiq	April 1994 to November 1996	Program Director
4. Alamgir Gandapur	December 1996 to June 1997	Project Director
5. Gul Najam Jamy	June 1997 to December 1998	Director
6. Hamid Raza Afridi	December 1998 to October 1999	Acting Project Manager
7. Shuja ur Rehman	October 1999 to date	Manager

Focal Points/Coordinators

Sector	Name	Duration
SPCS	Hameed Hasan	May 1993 to December 1995
Communication	1. Mohammad Fayyaz	May 1994 to October 1998
	2. Zafar Iqbal Khattak	November 1998 to October 1999
	3. Qasim Zaman Khan	April 2000 to November 2001
	4. Nadeem Yaqub	March 2002 to date
NGO	1. Siddiq Ahmad Khan	September 1998 to October 1998
	2. Saleemullah Khan	November 1998 to December 2001
	3. Siddiq Akbar Siddiqui	October 2001 to date
Culture Heritage	1. Hamid Raza Afridi	November 1995 to December 1999
	2. Bakhtiar Ahmad	March 2000 to June 2001
Industry	1. Shaukat Hayat	November 1995 to October 1997
	2. Iftikhar Malik	July 1997 to June 2001
Education	1. Zubaida Khalid	December 1995 to June 1998
	2. Fatima Daud Kamal	November 1998 to October 1999
	3. Mahnaz Iftikhar	October 1999 to November 2000
	4. Mariam Amin Khan	February 2001 to June 2001
Urban Environment	1. Gul Najam Jamy	February 1996 to January 1997
	2. Arshad Samad Khan	March 1997 to June 2001

Focal Points/Coordinators (continued)

Sector	Name	Duration
PE&D	1. Iftikhar Malik	June 1996 to June 1997
	2. Faheem Khan	June 1999 to September 1999
	3. Manzoor Ahmad Sethi	July 2000 to June 2001
	4. Waqar Ahmad	May 2000 to date
Agriculture	1. Manzoor Ahmad Sethi	November 1996 to June 2000
	2. Rizwan Ahmad	February 2001 to date
Training	1. Asif Hameed Khan	June 1997 to February 2000
EPA	1. Fiza Gul	July 1999 to October 2000
	2. Arshad Samad Khan	July 2001 to date
Forestry	1. Inamullah Khan	May 2000 to June 2001

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Project Managers

Strategy	Name	Duration
Chitral Conservation Strategy	Shuja ur Rehman	December 1996 to October 1999
	Inayatullah Faizi	April 2000 to date
Abbottabad Conservation Strategy	Amanullah Khan	February 1997 to June 2000
	Sardar Taimur H. Khan	August 2000 to June 2001
	Iftikhar Malik	July 2001 to date

Annex III

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District Level Public Consultations

S. No.	Place	Date
1	Peshawar	January 13, 1994
2	Mardan	February 9, 1994
3	Swabi	March 2, 1994
4	Charsadda	March 9, 1994
5	Nowshera	March 24, 1994
6	Dera Ismail Khan	April 5, 1994
7	Tank	April 6, 1994
8	Kohat	April 12, 1994
9	Abbottabad	April 20, 1994
10	Karak	April 23, 1994
11	Mansehra	April 27, 1994
12	Battagram	April 28, 1994
13	Bunner	May 5, 1994
14	Lakki Marwat	May 14, 1994
15	Bannu	May 16, 1994
16	Haripur	May 18, 1994
17	Swat	May 30, 1994
18	Dir	May 31, 1994
19	Chitral	June 26, 1994
20	Kohistan	September 14 , 1994
21	Malakand Agency	December 14, 1994

Annex IV

Composition of the SPCS Steering Committee

Chairman Additional Chief Secretary, Planning and Development Department Government of NWFP

- Members
1. Sardar Ghulam Nabi, MPA Abbottabad
 2. Mr. Lal Khan, MPA Malakand Agency
 3. Joint Secretary, NCS Unit, Ministry of Environment, Urban Affairs, Forests and Wildlife
 4. Secretary, Finance Department
 5. Secretary, Food, Agriculture, Livestock and Cooperative Department
 6. Secretary, Forests, Fisheries and Wildlife Department
 7. Secretary, Communications and Works Department
 8. Secretary, Industries, Commerce, Labour, Mineral Development and Transport Department
 9. Secretary, Irrigation and Public Health Engineering Department
 10. Secretary, Physical Planning and Housing Department
 11. Secretary, Information, Sports, Culture and Tourism Department
 12. Director General, EPA
 13. Director, PCSIR Peshawar
 14. Vice Chancellor, NWFP Agricultural University
 15. President, Pakistan Environmental Protection Foundation
 16. Javed Saifullah Khan, KK Company
 17. Haji Abdul Ali, Member, Executive Committee, Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry
 18. Begum Zari Sarfaraz
 19. Mr. A. Rahim Masood
 20. Media Representative
 21. IUCN Pakistan Representative Chief of Section, Environment, Planning and Development Department.
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Annex V

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Profile of Public Consultations

Village Consultations, Female

Number of Consultations		5
Number of Participants		240
People in a consultation	– Maximum number	85
	– Minimum number	7

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Location

S. No.	District	Tehsil	Village
1	Bannu	Bannu	Shahaz Azmat Kheil
2	Lakki	Lakki	Begukhel
3	Tank	Tank	Mulazi
4	DI Khan	Kulachi	Muddi
5	DI Khan	DI Khan	Paharpur

Annex VI

Sector-specific Public Consultations

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S.No.	Sector	Date
1	Peshawar University	January 11, 1994
2	Pakistan Forest Institute, Peshawar	February 3, 1994
3	Media	July 27, 1994
4	Trade and Labour Unions	August 29, 1994
5	Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industries	September 21, 1994
6	Sarhad Chamber of Agriculture	October 31, 1994
7	Women	February 1, 1995
8	Information, Sports, Culture and Tourism Department	May 23, 1995
9	Finance Department	May 25, 1995
10	Public Health Engineering Department	June 4, 1995
11	Industries, Commerce, Labour, Mineral Development and Transport Department	June 7, 1995
12	Local Government and Rural Development Department	June 11, 1995
13	Education Department	June 13, 1995
14	Forests, Fisheries and Wildlife Department	June 13, 1995
15	Physical, Planning and Housing Department/Provincial Urban Development Board	June 14, 1995

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List of Roundtables

S. No.	Name of Roundtable	Notification	No. of Members
1	Industries	October 1996	23
2	Urban Environment	October 1996	40
3	Agriculture	January 1997	46
4	Communication	December 1994	29
5	NGOs	March 1995	35
6	Education	June 1997	40
7	Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Tourism	February 1998	48
8	Chitral Conservation Strategy	August 1997	68
9	Abbottabad Conservation Strategy	February 1998	41

Annex VIII

Main Training Events Under the SPCS

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S. No.	Particular of Training	No. of Participants	Date
1	One-week Training in Decision-making for Resource Sustainability (LEAD Program)	20	1998
2	One-week Training in Leadership for Sustainable Development Stakeholders Dialogue in Policy Planning for Integrated Development (LEAD Program)	20	1998
3	One-week Training in Strategic Planning for Sustainable Development: Vision, Mission and Tools (LEAD Program)	20	1998
4	Two-day Training Workshop on Environment (EPM) for Kohat and Nowshera Clusters of SPO-NWFP	30	1998
5	One-week Training in Measuring the Success of Investments, Planning and Monitoring (LEAD Program)	20	1999
6	Two-week Training for Bureau of Curriculum (Peshawar)	35	1999
7	Three-day Training Workshop on Environmental Auditing for Industries Department	20	1999
8	Three-day Training Workshop on Writing Project Proposal for Staff of LG&RDD	22	1999
9	Three-day Training Workshop for LG&RDD staff on Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) Karachi	10	1999
10	Three-day Training Workshop in Environmental Sensitization and Project Proposal Development for CBOs Organizers in Collaboration with FRC Peshawar at Agricultural University	25	1999
11	Two-week Training for Bureau of Curriculum (Ayubia)	28	1999
12	One-week Training in the Economics of Environmental Sustainability (LEAD Program)	20	1999
13	One-week Training in Animal Nutrition – Fodder and Forage Production	24	1999
14	Two-week Training in Development of Environment Auditing Capacity in Pakistan	3	1999
15	Two-week Specialized Training of Trainers in Improved Technologies for Sustainable Production of Fodders and Forage Crops	17	1999
16	One-week Training in Environment-friendly Farming and Biodiversity Conservation Practices	14	1999

Main Training Events Under the SPCS (continued)

	S. No.	Particular of Training	No. of Participants	Date
Moving the Frontier: The Story of the Sarhad Provincial Conservation Strategy	17	Two-week Training in Environment-friendly Livestock Management Practices	26	1999
	18	Series of three-day Trainings on Greening of NGOs (AKRSP, SPO, SRSP)	100	1999-2000
	19	Two-week Training for Planners in Project Planning and Implementation for Agriculture and LG&RD Department	28	2000
	20	One-week Specialized Training of Field Assistants, Stock Assistants and Farmers in Fodder and Forage Production	27	2000
	21	36-hour Training on Eco-tourism	21	2000
	22	One-month course in Computer Operations for Interns	12	2000
	23	One-week Training on Measuring and Managing Ecological Footprints: Ethics and Sustainability (LEAD Program)	18	2000
	24	Eight-day Training in Industrial Environmental Management	20	2000
	25	36-hour Training in Communication and Presentation Skills	23	2000
	26	One-week Training for Officers of Forest Department in Project Cycle Management	3	2000
	27	One-week Training for Officers of Forest Department in Communication, Presentation and Creative Writing Skills	20	2001
	28	40-hour Training in Communication and Persuasion Skills	20	2001

Annex IX

Sarhad NGOs Ittehad (SNI)

Sarhad NGOs Ittehad (SNI) is a provincial level coalition of NGOs constituted in 1995. The membership of SNI mainly comprises NGOs and CBOs of NWFP. SNI consists of:

- General Body
- Provincial Council
- Working Council

The total members of Provincial Council in SNI are 64, consisting of NGOs and CBOs with a 25 per cent and 75 per cent representation respectively. Total number of members of working council in SNI are 15 consisting of NGOs and CBOs elected by members of Provincial Council with a 33 per cent and 66 per cent representation respectively.

Annex X

Kabul River Study

In 1994, the IUCN in collaboration with Department of Environmental Planning and Management, Peshawar University, with the financial assistance of NORAD, conducted a detailed study on the Kabul River. The principal objectives of this study were to determine the locations where polluted effluents were being discharged into the Kabul River and the types of pollution. The study was conducted due to the following reasons:

- organic pollution is worst in the Shah Alam branch of the river due to effluents from sugar mills and sewage from the city of Peshawar, and just downstream of Nowshera;
- chromium, copper, nickel and zinc are present in concentrations above those suitable for the maintenance of fisheries and aquatic life;
- data concerning sulphides which are present in high concentrations, are anomalous and more research is needed to explain the situation;
- contaminants in the drainage from several industrial complexes, some owned by the government, are unacceptably high and will need much attention if they are to meet the new environmental quality standards announced by the government of Pakistan; and
- two very dirty tributaries, the Bara River and the Kalpani River, also need urgent attention, due to the high levels of human use.

The study analyzed the impacts of various pollutants. In this respect an action plan was proposed in the study, which included both short- and long-term proposals. Salient points were as follows:

- government should use existing legislation to take action against the worst industrial polluters, particularly those which it owns;
- the Environmental Protection Agency should be strengthened, particularly its enforcement capability, to prepare for the new environment quality standards which will come into force for existing industries on July 1, 1996;
- the SPCS Unit should take responsibility for publicizing the results of the report and monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan;
- the Swat and Chitral rivers, which are comparatively clean, need to be without effluent or sewage treatment;
- several abandoned industrial premises should be assessed and, where necessary, cleaned up; and
- additional scientific studies are required to answer several outstanding questions. These include: a human health survey; a analysis of contamination in fish; sampling for broader ranges of pollutants, particularly agricultural chemicals; and a more detailed look at several of the known contaminants such as metals and sulphides.

In the long term, priority must continue to be placed on two areas of activity:

- continuing effort must be applied to the treatment of urban sewage. The second urban development project is already underway, but even when full-fledged, it will not deal with all the major sources. Additional planning should begin for the cities and towns not already being treated; and
- efforts should begin to reform the existing water management structures and their legal underpinning. The SPCS Unit should undertake this task in the next phase of its work.

The conclusion of this study shows that the Kabul River is dirty and in several locations is unfit for human consumption. This is due to the heavy loading of human sewage and effluents from some industrial hotspots.

Annex XI

List of Demonstration Projects

1. Environmental Clean-up Demonstration Model in the Marble Industry (Mineral Testing Laboratory, Sarhad Development Authority)
2. Rehabilitation of Assia Park (Peshawar Municipal Cooperation), Local Government and Rural Development Department
3. Pilot Projects for Promoting Floriculture Through Womenfolk in Peshawar and Kohat Divisions (Fruit and Vegetable Development Board)
4. Adaptive Research and Demonstration of High Fodder Yielding Summer Grass Legume Mixtures (Agricultural University)
5. Cultural Heritage Trail Network Through Eco-tourism Peshawar (Sarhad Tourism Corporation)
6. Environmental Education Training Workshop for Primary and Secondary School Teachers (Education Department)
7. Construction of Head Works and Protective Wall of Five Channels (Multi-purpose Cooperative Society Koghuzi) Chitral
8. Development of Community Environment at Takht Bhai, Mardan

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About the author...

Mark Halle directs the International Institute for Sustainable Development's office in Europe as well as the institute's global programme on Trade and Investment. He has worked for the past 25 years in the field of international environmental cooperation, both with the United Nations Environment Programme and with leading NGOs such as WWF and IUCN.

While working as IUCN's Director of Field Operations, he established the country programme in Pakistan and was closely involved in establishing the country office and in launching the Pakistan National Conservation Strategy process. By the time the SPCS was launched, he had moved on to other responsibilities, but has continued to visit Pakistan on a regular basis.

He joined IISD in 1998 and is based in Geneva, Switzerland.



Moving the Frontier tells the compelling story of the Sarhad Provincial Conservation Strategy (SPCS). Launched in 1991, the strategy was the first key, on-the-ground test of the Pakistan National Conservation Strategy. This volume captures the history of the SPCS and examines how well its environmental approach stood up to the realities of the day. It is a story of challenges and successes; expectations and personalities. And ultimately, it's a story of lessons learned.

