

# Area-based development project Iran

A demonstration project for  
improving the status of  
children and women  
through integrated  
participatory community  
development 1998-2000

## Participatory Evaluation

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
Universities of Medical Sciences of the Provinces of Hormozgan, Kohgiluyeh-Boyer-Ahmad, Kurdistan  
(Ministry of Health and Medical Education)  
Centre for Sustainable Development and Environment (CENESTA)

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## Note to the reader/user

This has been a “participatory evaluation”, which is a rather broad concept, and had multiple implications in the present case.

At community level – 10 of the 15 project communities were visited; participatory (PRA-type) exercises and open-ended discussions were conducted with many different categories of people in each community, especially men and women, but sometimes also adolescents and children. These participants came from project related groups as well as the general community and local leaders. There were also village walk-about in many locations, with the agenda set by the community.

At district and provincial level – participatory meetings and additional open-ended discussions were conducted, with participants from multiple sectors where possible, and multiple departments of health

when other sectors were not present. Facilitation strategies encouraged a free exchange of ideas in these meetings, including contradicting and opposing views.

At central level – stakeholders were consulted at length about their perceptions and desires for the evaluation, and then a very multisectoral group of representatives actively participated in a two-day meeting to consider the preliminary findings and ways forward.

The core team for the ‘evaluation’ consisted of four people: a UNICEF staff member (Ms. Laylee Moshiri), a staff member of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (Mr. Seyed Asaei), a staff member and co-director of CENESTA (Dr. Taghi Farvar), and the team leader/facilitator who was recruited from Uganda (Dr. Tom Barton). The team collaborated in planning activities and gathering information in the field (with everyone else at one time or another helping the external team member who did not have any Farsi).

In addition, the core team was capably assisted by other CENESTA staff members, the project co-ordinators in each region, and the animators in each of the communities.

As a participatory exercise, the contents of this report have come principally from the first-hand comments made to the team members and observations in the field. An effort has been made to give primacy to the community voice, while also preserving and presenting the views of all other stakeholders and interested parties that were consulted by the team.

## Abbreviations

ABP	.....	Area-Based Programme
CBOs	.....	Community-Based Organisations
CENESTA	.....	Centre for Sustainable Development and Environment
DHC	.....	District Health Centre
HHs	.....	Households
IGAs	.....	Income Generating Activities
MoH	.....	Ministry of Health and Medical Education
NGOs	.....	Non-Governmental Organisations
PHO	.....	Public Health Office
PMD	.....	Provincial Medical Director
RHC	.....	Rural Health Centre
SWOT	.....	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TMWs	.....	Traditional Midwives
ToRs	.....	Terms of Reference
UNICEF	.....	United Nations Children’s Fund
VC	.....	Village Council

## Acknowledgements

Communities – to all of the communities of the ABP, the team is very grateful for the hospitality, the free exchange of ideas, and for sharing both your enthusiasm for this project and your candour about its difficulties.

Ministry of Health and Medical Education and UNICEF – the team is very thankful to both the Ministry and UNICEF for co-sponsoring the evaluation, for participating completely throughout in the data collection/fieldwork, for assisting with translation, and for listening as well as sharing their expertise and organisational opinions.

CENESTA – the team sincerely appreciated the dedication, facilitation, resource materials, accessibility, support, excitement over ideas and learning demonstrated during course of the evaluation.

Government of Iran – the team acknowledges the support of the Government for participatory processes in the community, and for allowing this kind of participatory visit to village level.

## Executive summary

### Background – to project and evaluation

The Area-Based Development project, funded by the UNICEF Country Programme for Iran, has been implemented by the Centre for Sustainable Development and Environment (CENESTA) with the Co-operation of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education. The two-year project officially began in August 1998, and was expected to last until July 2000. This evaluation, carried out in 2000, was requested to: a) assess the process, results and impacts so far achieved; b) assess appropriateness and effectiveness of the adopted strategic approach; and c) provide recommendations to UNICEF, CENESTA, the project institutional partners and the beneficiary communities for optimising the project impacts and pursuing lessons learned in all appropriate contexts.

### Core elements and aims of the project

#### Objectives of the project (project document)

1. To plan and carry out demonstration projects in three provinces of Iran with the specific aims of: protecting and promoting the rights of children and women; improving their health and well-being; and reducing regional disparities with national indicators.
2. To ensure that objective 1, once achieved, will remain self-sustainable beyond the life of the project. That is, issues of child and woman well-being will be addressed within the framework of an integrated and participatory area-based programme.

#### Implementation strategy

To reach the above objectives, the project adopted a framework of working principles (cultural respect, transparency, mutual trust, sustainability, etc.) and a strategic approach focused on integrated, participatory community development for creating locally sustainable wealth and capacity. The project designers started from the premise that it would be desirable to have a local system to work in parallel with the official (district-based) system and yet be independent of it – so that the two systems could have a symbiotic relationship. They sought to empower beneficiary communities with the means to make provisions for their own livelihoods and eventually be able to act independently in order to make long-term plans for the common and direct benefit of the local community.

To meet these aims, the idea of “sanduq” (community investment group) was embraced as the best avenue for such empowerment. The sanduqs were evolved from (and linked to) traditional systems of communal sharing for mutual protection and well-being. In recognition that the principal source materials for wealth development in the communities were the indigenous natural resources, this project also gave attention to improving the sustainability of utilising such resources. Community organising and empowerment, wealth generation and sustainable management of natural resources are thus the three strategic pillars of the project in supporting enhanced awareness and action for women and child health and well-being.

#### Reviewer commentary

Implementation strategy - The Sanduqs are a remarkable, and highly effective innovation in the Iranian setting and are discussed at greater length later in this review. They fit very well the intended approach emphasising cultural sensitivity, transparency, and participation. As such, they appear to be not only viable, but also to have a high potential for sustainability.

### Context and setting

#### Problems – Poverty, disparity in access to services and resources

Poverty - The theme of poverty was recurrent in the project areas, as expected since it was a criterion in their selection for the project. Many communities linked poverty to unemployment, especially for young people. Many people in rural communities want improvement of their conditions and are willing to work hard toward that end. However, the poverty is a constraining factor inducing a desire for immediate solutions and unwillingness or inability to invest in solutions that take time to mature.

***We need employment guidance. Poor people can't wait for bread to come out of the oven, and so they eat it uncooked; rich people can afford to wait for the wheat to grow.*** (Oraman village, religious leader)

Disparities - Poor access to transport and roads has increased difficulties with local income generation, creation of employment, and accessing essential services and markets. While national studies show increasing levels of education, there were obvious disparities in the programme communities. Guidance (middle level) and secondary schools were generally located quite far from the communities, posing a barrier of distance and cost to higher education for the rural pupils, especially for girls. In spite of remarkable national achievements in access to health services, low coverage was still a problem in many of the programme communities. In some communities, there was no behvarz (community-based health worker), and the nearest health unit was 10 kms or more away. In such settings, cost and distance can become almost insurmountable barriers to health care.

Access to water for all purposes is often insecure or not assured of sustainability in the programme areas. Disposal of human wastes (sewerage) is recognised as a common problem in the programme communities, and has been linked by the communities themselves to poverty-related issues such as income, education and ethnicity. Solid waste (rubbish) was amassing continuously in the villages, generally with little effort to control it, despite a popular recognition that rubbish constitutes a health and well-being problem.

#### Resources – in and out of the community

Councils - Village councils have been mandated in the national constitution for some time, but only established during the present government for most villages. As such, not all areas have managed to set up the councils, and where they do exist, many of them are still feeling their way for how to co-ordinate development, especially with little local capital. At the present time, the village council links with the sub-district governor's office, but there is no council arrangement at the sub-district level – though there are provisions for such in the national constitution. Villages above 100 households are also mandated to have a local health council, selected by the community; but again, the extent of implementation of this concept is highly variable.

Community based organisations (CBOs) - Many organisations exist at community level serving a wide range of interests, e.g., religious groups, education and literacy improvement, income generation, civil leadership, gender interests, and others.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) - Modern NGOs are present, but have not been there for a very long time due to opposition in earlier governments. They have to be registered, have a transparent constitution, and their mandate should be indicated to the relevant ministry.

Service sectors (government) - formal health care in Iran is built on the behvarz system, which started some 20 years ago; it is based on a 'health house' with two behvarz (one male, one female community-based trained health worker) for every village of 150 households or more. The behvarz system is considered by many to be the most complete infrastructure present out to village level, and thereby influenced the choice of health as the parent sector for the Area Based Programme. Most communities have primary schools, even the relatively small ones. Adult literacy programmes were present in almost all communities, though their activity was dependent on the availability of teachers.

Access to utilities - Most programme communities (except some summer villages of transhumanent groups) have access to electricity and water, which are managed by district level units.

### **Programme activities/processes**

#### Organisation of the ABP project

Origins of the project - The project partners (Ministry of Health, UNICEF, and CENESTA) identified the problem of disparities in health and well-being and decided to work from a bottom-up community-based approach toward overcoming these disparities. Their planning led to the present three province (15 community) area-based project. The selection of districts and villages was based on disparities, looking at some of the lowest performing districts for regions that were in difficult situations but also had stakeholders interested to help bring about change. The project formally started 1½ years prior to this evaluation, with village level implementation beginning about six months after that.

Scope of ABP - According to the partners, there were many discussions at the beginning to develop the project; they were interested in trying to build sustainable system, with no need to ask for money all the time. The institutional partners emphasised critical concerns about participation, capacity

building and improving the conditions of women and children. As CENESTA has put it, it is a process-oriented project that has been evolving based on the lessons learned from the communities. In the words of a UNICEF staff member, it has been an experimental, pilot project. As a Ministry of Health staff member put it in Yasuj, the project is based on traditions of co-operation and then assessing the capacity of villages for self-management.

**Stakeholder roles** - The key stakeholders identified in this project were communities, local authorities, MoH, UNICEF and CENESTA. Regarding the roles of the various stakeholders, the role of community people has been pre-eminently important, with government as a facilitator, UNICEF as a funder, and CENESTA as a technical resource cum facilitator. Decisions were made by the communities in a self-contained way.

#### Preparatory activities – mobilising, capacity building, planning

**Mobilising** – The participating communities were initially mobilised by local social science experts identified by CENESTA, and encouraged to set up a general assembly for development issues. All households, without restriction, were urged to participate in the general assembly. Out of this group, the villages elected a Sanduq committee, usually consisting of about 10-15 members, and comprised of both men and women. At the time of the evaluation, these committees were present, and generally quite active. The communities also selected their own local community animators for training and later supporting and facilitating their community development efforts.

**Capacity building** - The first major collective activity of the project brought together new community animators for a three-week workshop in Jask facilitated by the implementing NGO (CENESTA). The meeting enhanced local decision making capability, obtained support from local authorities and met or addressed some important gender equity challenges. The participants got knowledge and skills for problem identification, prioritisation, solution planning, and economic feasibility analysis. They had discussions about child rights, how to gather baseline information, preparing log frames and proposals. They also discussed and proposed by-laws for the sanduq organisations in their communities. As reported by various animators who attended the workshop, the project was presented as a blank sheet for their villages and sanduqs to fill in, based on local needs and resources.

**Planning** - After the workshop, the animators returned to their communities to stimulate a series of activities culminating in a local plan. This included a village workshop to explain the process and then collecting data by household interview, key informant interviews, and some focus groups. Men, women, children separately listed and clustered and prioritised their issues and concerns. Men talked about men's problems; women talked of women's problems; but the children talked of both child and parent problems.

***In some of the very early sessions the project people were pushing the children away; until they remembered the project was aimed at helping children, and then they were included to a greater extent. They did some participatory mapping, and then the adults started even respecting the children more.*** (Amir-Abad village, animator)

Next, the community discussed possible solutions, their assets, and possibilities of resources locally and from outside the community. This was a time of planning and preparing multiple trial proposals at the village level. Many of the villages prioritised economic security as the first or principal problem affecting their well-being. In their subsequent planning, the animators and communities tried to find projects that would address multiple problems for the village, e.g., planting crops that could be used locally for improved nutrition as well as having commercial value.

**Support** – During the planning process, UNICEF committed itself to giving seed money (2,000,000 Tumans) to the programme communities that would be based on local proposals. UNICEF recognised that economic projects were not an area of strength for their organisation, but were willing to contribute to a pilot project where communities prioritised economic needs. The UNICEF seed money was for community income generating activities with the understanding that 20% of the income generated would be used to improve the situation of women and children in the community. After approving the proposal, UNICEF sent the money with the freedom that the community could revise the plan. Because a mechanism was required for handling the money, communities were requested to establish a bank account, which was an innovation for most of them.

In addition to funds, the communities also received some additional 'in-kind' support from UNICEF and CENESTA. UNICEF facilitated donation of a library of 300 books for each participating community and CENESTA provided three solar cookers per community. Around the midpoint of the project, computers and printers were made available to the co-ordinating sanduqs (one per province) through UNICEF and the implementing NGO (CENESTA).

## Implementation and Achievements/results

### Participation

Participation strengths – Respondents in the evaluation affirmed the participatory nature of the Area-Based Programme, and offered many indications of its participatory character and outcomes. Participating communities have felt more self-confidence as a consequence of the project activities, including training, analysis and practice of skills

***We did not know anything before the project, but now we know public health, and we are able to talk to and write to the governor.*** (Siromj village animator)

Observers reported that communities were doing more planning for themselves than they were capable of prior to the project. This was linked to their increasing capacity for analysis. People are now co-operating in the sanduqs, and beginning to realise the capacity for generating community wealth rather than just individual gain. The injections of support and encouragement to plan in this project have indeed functioned as if a seed were being planted and nurtured. As an example, one community was able to mobilise both local and governmental support to resolve an important local crisis – rebuilding irrigation ditches destroyed by floods.

Participation weaknesses – There have been some difficulties with mobilising women in the project areas, as animators, members of the sanduq committees, and as health workers. This is linked to the intensity of cultural values and sensitivity related to gender; in the face of such feelings, the project designers focussed in the beginning on getting the participation of male community members. They felt that it was imperative to establish a degree of trust in these traditionally male dominated communities before seeking active involvement of female community members, which could take much longer than the two years of this project cycle.

Accountability - Many of the sanduqs are being created in environments that are not accustomed to formal accounting, either because of limitations of literacy, or because collective enterprise has not often occurred in the past. Despite the limited background with formal accounting procedures, the sanduqs and the implementing agency report that villages have been able to devise accounting methods in order to maintain the sanduqs. Building on this indigenous understanding has a strong advantage in participatory 'ownership' of the accounting. At the same time, however, it can introduce various inconsistencies and thereby affect monitoring by the co-ordinating sanduqs or CENESTA.

A second issue is that the accountability system at the present time seems to be set up on an annual basis, which may not be adequate for communicating with the participating communities and ensuring their continued confidence in the system. Care is needed to be sure that the system is adequately transparent for all community members to understand and to ensure that the sanduq leaders remain accountable and good guardians of their communities' interests.

Preventive health and environmental sanitation behaviour - Some latrines were reportedly built in most of the villages, and attributed to the inputs of the project. However, the achievements in this area were often lower than what the animators and co-ordinators desired for the communities. According to the project implementers, this may represent overly high aspirations by the community animators and co-ordinators. The project was not financially equipped to take on an expensive latrine-building programme, and the provision of latrines was not a part of the UNICEF sponsored component of this project. The planners have also noted that the Government is well equipped and has the financial means to take on such an endeavour.

Many of the rural villages complained of solid waste (rubbish) build-up in their communities, but rather than organising local clean-up arrangements, they were waiting for/expecting sectoral assistance for mechanised clean-ups, similar to those occurring in urban areas. Again, this represents a mismatch between expectations and resources available.

### Sectoral/Intersectoral collaboration

Although intersectoral support was implied by the objectives of the programme, it was not explicitly stated. The intention to foster multisectoral collaboration was, however, described in the overall goals and guiding principles of the project. According to some of the project planners, this softer approach to co-ordination was intentional in order to break the vertical model of previous community projects.

Strengths of sectoral/Intersectoral collaboration - During the implementation, the programme workers encouraged and facilitated the process of developing contacts with local authorities, especially sub-district and district governors. These authorities, in turn, were able in some areas to facilitate intersectoral linkages, e.g., with water, agriculture, social affairs, co-operatives, fisheries, etc. Some government sectors in the programme districts/provinces are quite aware of the programme, and some have visited the project settings/villages. Examples were available of positive sectoral collaboration with villages in many areas, including water, agriculture, health, communications, and administration.

Weaknesses of sectoral/Intersectoral collaboration – It was reported that sectoral co-ordination rests with the sub-district and district governors' offices. There is no collective forum at which village/community issues are routinely presented to and input received from multiple sectors under the governors. Thus, the extent of co-ordination varies considerably from one area to another, depending on the interest of the officials and their duration in office (which was sometimes preciously short before they were transferred or moved to other areas). As a result, although there has been collaboration of some sectors with villages, it was hard to find evidence of simultaneous collaboration between multiple sectors with the same villages. This is a difficult situation to resolve in a project as short as two years, since changing institutional behaviours is not a quick process.

### Planning

Local workplans for the first project year - The project villages shared a common short-term plan for 1999 that contained 14 items that could perhaps be clustered into four broad categories as follows<sup>1</sup>:

#### **Organisational capacity building (and training)**

- Activate the female animator
- Helping set up local CBO, i.e., the Sanduq
- Elaboration of a local action plan
- Setting up library and development house

#### **Household livelihood/well-being support**

- Starting WGAs in the community
- Continue use of solar cooker
- Construction of toilets

#### **Child welfare**

- Workshop on pre-school issues
- Promotion of child rights
- Support to vulnerable groups
- Training for TMWs and child growth cards

#### **Documentation (and its support)**

- Collection of local data
- Periodic reports on progress
- Computer training and use

The common plan came out of the three-week animators' workshop in Jask near the beginning of the project. It was principally a product of the community animators, in conjunction with CENESTA and UNICEF support. While there were strengths to a symmetrical short term plan (ease of monitoring and developing capacity building support, building consensus among project communities), there were also some limitations to this approach. Among the limitations were tendencies to shift some of the analysis of baseline information and even of plan achievements from the community level to the central NGO level in order to consolidate and compare findings.

Long term plans - Involvement with this project has substantially raised the planning interest and capability of the participating communities. The communities are beginning to dream and open their horizons beyond the mundane. A wide range of potential larger scale projects were being conceived and explored by communities, ranging from producing bottled water, to building schools, to improving access to transport. Some communities were already creating concept papers and proposals for these ideas, and starting to discuss them with the responsible government sectors.

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that the project team has begun to apply the term WGA– wealth generating activities – as a strategy to empower a broader community orientation than IGA – income generating activities.

### Economic activities

Use of sanduq funds – the sanduqs were using the seed money in several different ways. What is exciting is that they were succeeding at becoming profitable in all the different areas, and doing so in quite a short time despite various constraints. The more common strategy was communal investment in a joint venture (e.g., a retail grocery in Surgalm, a wholesale store in Gohert, a fishing boat with motor and nets in Baghan). These joint ventures sometimes included co-funding by wealthy community members, enabling the seed money to contribute to substantially bigger projects than it might have done otherwise. Less commonly, some of the communities, especially in the Yasuj area (e.g., Amir-Abad, Bar Aftab), decided to use their money to fund local micro-credit projects.

Micro-credit - The communities in the Kohgiluyeh-Boyer-Ahmad province elected to do micro-credit schemes with local decisions about what to do with profits and how to sustain the projects and income. These schemes are carried out as a collective exercise and are administered entirely by the community. The community funds are easy to get compared to money from government or banks, where you have to go many, many times to get any. Spouses (both men and women) sign together for the microcredit, which is an innovation in bringing the women openly into the financial arena. There is no collateral for the loans; guarantees are made by another person in the community. So far, the sanduq is regarding the money returned plus interest as new loan money, increasing the capital available for loans, and therefore the overall wealth of the community.

Co-investment/shop schemes - To get started, the Sanduq used the animator, the Sanduq committee, and experts from the CENESTA project. They identified opportunities and feasibility, and supported the start up of the IGA project. In a simple version, Surgalm village now has a general retail food store, selling a range of products, including dairy products that had not previously been available locally. At the other end, of the spectrum, Gohert village managed to use their seed money from UNICEF to leverage additional funds from private sources, reaching a total almost ten times higher – and then opened a wholesale store. The arrangement is that 10% of the earnings on the leveraged supplemental funds goes to the Sanduq, plus 100% of the earnings on the original UNICEF donation. This shop is thriving; they now buy in Tehran and Mashad rather than Bandar Abbas, because of the expanded scope of the project. One benefit of the wholesale shop is that four to five families can now get together and buy a whole bag of sugar at lower cost, and then sub-divide it among themselves.

Local production schemes - The Kikan community has access to a tube well; and their irrigated agriculture scheme is producing vegetables and tomatoes that are being sold for income. Fifteen households are currently participating, and others now want to join. The project team have highlighted Kikan village as a good example of intersectoral cooperation – the agriculture sector helped to design the irrigation systems. It also acted as an intermediary to transfer the pump to the community because at the time the sanduq was not yet set-up. The energy sector brought electric lines and gave them credit to do the wiring, and the local government monitored the process. In Naw village, there is a shoe-making co-operative, producing a design of shoes that is traditional for the region, and able to be marketed nationally and perhaps soon, internationally.

### Transfer of ideas

Spread of innovations - According to the information available to the review, this project is unique, at least in the regions where it has been established, and probably in the whole country. As such, the spread of ideas from this project may be an important indicator of impact, as well as showing receptiveness to its expansion or replication in other areas.

Neighbouring communities - There were several examples of how project innovations are beginning to spread to neighbouring communities. Where neighbouring villages see that a village's needs are being met, it can be a powerful entry point for sharing ideas and stimulating participation.

Information sharing - some of the technical people associated with the project are beginning to transfer the lessons learnt to other arenas. All the villages indicated willingness to share their experiences with other groups that are interested in the project, including other villages that want to try a similar approach.

Documentation – The project villages are maintaining their own archives of correspondence, handouts, data collection and PRA maps and tools that have been created locally. The implementing NGO, CENESTA, has also made a significant effort to collect copies of all of the key documents.

CENESTA has then archived copies, as well as presenting copies to important stakeholders, like the provincial government authorities. Animators have become accustomed to preparing activity reports, and are increasingly using the project computers to write these reports.

#### Education and child development

**Libraries/books** - All of the project communities had received a donation of books from UNICEF and the Ministry of Education – 300 books, mostly targeted toward children. None of the villages had a community library before this donation. Some of the communities were particularly adamant about the positive value of the books for their community. Much as the books were appreciated, and communities were requesting more, it was unusual to find a community that had managed to supplement the original donation. This may be a reflection of a combination of factors – libraries as an exceedingly new innovation in communities, very rural communities with little or no access to book outlets, and even a lack of awareness among the various government sectors about the existence of the libraries and their potential to use them for circulating documents and facilitating their own sectoral education efforts.

**Child development** - four people (two male and two female) were invited from each of the programme villages to a workshop on child welfare and development. Following this workshop, the participants returned to their villages and tried to mobilise their communities to implement the ideas of the workshop, such as day care programmes, increased emphasis on child and women's rights, better nutrition for children, and more support to play and intellectual development for children. Some communities really took the child development workshop to heart and acted upon the ideas when they got home, e.g., developing recreation facilities and activities for children, improving child nutrition, and setting up a day care centre.

**Education for girls** - Access to education for girls has been limited in many areas, both in terms of family permission to attend, and in terms of schools that are set up to teach to girls. The project has worked intensively with the education sector in Jask, Bandar Abbas and in Tehran to improve this situation for the project areas.

**Child rights/child welfare** - Child rights issues were included in the initial three-week training workshop at Jask for community animators. Several of the communities have taken action on their own after the workshop, showing the potential for change when there is active follow-up in the community. Actions have included community meetings and discussions, better communication with children, more participation of children in community events, identifying vulnerable children, and even taking ownership of a child welfare programme that had previously been ignored.

**Women rights and activism** - There were both good and feeble examples of community response to the issue of women's rights that had also been promoted in the initial Jask workshop. It was reported that in some communities, women get more respect, and interactions and understanding have improved. In other areas, however, the initial enthusiasm has waned and women have reverted to a more passive role in public committees and events.

**Computer** - computers and printers were availed to the co-ordinating Sanduqs. The co-ordinators were expected to use the computers to prepare written reports on their activities and achievements. Many animators, including the executive directors of the sanduqs were making use of the computers to generate reports for the sanduq. In addition, some training has been provided to interested persons. This training was not highly structured, i.e., there was no particular curriculum, but it stimulated a lot of interest. Meanwhile, there were also some constraints in moving into the information age for the villages, for example, in achieving consensus about the value of the new technology and reaching an equitable arrangement for shared use of the items.

#### Environment

While this project is still relatively young, the strong environmental background of CENESTA as the implementing agency has helped stimulate community awareness and support community involvement in environmental issues. Environmental activities that were adopted or promoted in many of the communities included improvement of human waste disposal – addressed principally through health education, though some sanduqs also used community funds to address the problem. The use of solar cookers was initiated as a pilot project, through a donation of such cookers to the sanduqs together with some training in their use, and engaging communities in making specific suggestions for

improvements relative to their local practices and conditions. Although it was not part of the project proposal, some communities were also getting increasingly involved with tree planting, improved agricultural practices, advocacy for collaborative management of public lands and natural resources, and improved harvesting of natural resources.

### **Lessons learnt – about the current project**

#### Strengths of the ABP – participation, partnership, capacity building, access

Generating self-confidence - The project has been bringing about an increase in self-confidence, belief in oneself, belief in one's capacity, among rural people in villages and communities selected in the project. People in these project communities have hope for the future.

Increasing participatory activity - Mobilisation is evident in the progressively greater engagement of women in project activities, though this aspect has been a bit slower since the project found it essential for cultural acceptability to start with the men. Discussions are taking place in a spirit of community collaboration and increasing participation of the whole community, including women and children. More communities are acting to make direct contact with government sectors for solving their problems.

Establishing community ownership of development - The development process is revealing the capacity of local communities: local analysis, developing their own project proposals, decision-making and local implementation. There is ample evidence of improved abilities of people in the project communities to identify their problems/needs and to prioritise them.

***Did not believe before this project that village people have the capacity to plan and decide. Now know that even people in low literate situations are better at identifying their needs than experts. (Yasuj PHO)***

This project has promoted decentralised planning; community people are prioritising and reaching consensus about their needs, as well as seeking solutions and proposing actions on those problems based on their own ideas and experiences. Respondents noted that the communities are now making more effective use of their existing resources, including human and natural resources, at the village level. Communities are quite visibly active in participatory management of the project, e.g., operating shops, raising animals, and doing agriculture. The active role of the animators in mobilising the communities and implementing activities has been a key element in this success.

Partnership with community, stakeholders – Another key element in the participatory nature of this project is the development of collaboration and partnerships. There are many examples of increased alliances among and between local communities and involved groups. Communities have appreciated the respect among the stakeholders in the project, and their attitude of collaboration and cooperation. For their part, the stakeholders seem to have respected traditional culture and traditions in each of the project areas, and even emphasised the restitution of such values.

Government attitudes, broadly taken, seem to have been positive, i.e., sectors supporting community participation, developing closer collaboration with the health sector at provincial and district levels, and building motivation among enthusiastic government sector people to support the project. Government had a relatively minor role at the beginning of the project, and this has helped its technical experts not to take over from the community while the communities were finding and developing their own strengths.

The donor agency, UNICEF, was praised by communities and the other stakeholders for its patience and support to the process. While UNICEF acknowledged that it had only put a relatively small amount of money into this modest pilot project, it was a seed that was watered and nurtured to active life and even considerable growth in most of the project communities.

The implementing NGO, CENESTA, was praised for its good, supportive attitude, and for using practical and applied methods instead of general ideas. Participants and stakeholders appreciated how they had been generating attention for an effective model of participatory and sustainable development.

Capacity building – Capacity building has been a critical factor linked to community participation. Capacity improvement can be perceived as a contributing factor, e.g., in the capacity building of many

people in order to allow or support implementation of the specific plans of the project. Changed attitudes and practices can also be perceived as an outcome of the project, e.g., the way that many communities are now developing proposals and starting activities that are well beyond the small resource inputs of the area-based project.

Communities have been sensitised about many topics, including health, children's rights, the role of women, local and traditional knowledge and management of projects and money. Residents have been mobilised to improve their sanitation, e.g., by building latrines, establishing home gardens that use wastewater, and keeping animal wastes away from the houses. There was widespread enthusiasm about the entry of new ideas and methods of livelihood into the villages, e.g., bee-keeping, poultry breeding, irrigated agriculture, and improved shoe-making. Many community residents have appreciated the opportunity to learn about solar cookery. It has also been a learning process for the community, i.e., gathering and discussing local experiences with the cooks.

One of the particular focal areas for capacity building in this project has been improving the well-being of vulnerable groups, especially women and children. To this end, there have been many examples given by the communities of the project, ranging from attention to health and family planning to improving family and children's nutrition.

Improved access to key resources (for capacity building, other) – better access to key resources is both a contributing factor to the project achievements, and is itself an achievement of the project. The net effect of improved access is to act as an incentive for involvement and thereby reinforce community participation.

The community development funds established by the Sanduqs were designed to accumulate wealth on behalf of communities.

***The issue is funding support; with this concern, the Sanduq idea was invented – investing returns and using some of the returns to meet needs of the community. The Sanduq is a good approach; it helps planning for development. Depending on money in the Sanduq, it can start other projects and respond to other development needs. (Health sector, Marivan meeting)***

Virtually all of the community economic activities had been initiated only a matter of months before the evaluation and were already generating income. Even so, some of the communities had already starting using some of these funds for community development, e.g., improvement of drinking water quality and recreation for children.

Many communities have taken the donated books and created community libraries. These libraries may be small in scale (at 250-300 books), but they very much appreciated where none had been present at all before. Children, adolescents and youth are the main library users.

Several communities have established grocery stores, which is expanding the variety of foods available, and thereby affecting local nutrition and giving women a more active role in making food choices and purchases for the family.

Several villages have brought communication resources nearer, improving access to the outside world (e.g., to markets, civil authorities, and the support of the implementing NGO). These have included telephones, copy machines and computers (with printers).

#### Challenges of the ABP – design, collaboration, support, sustainability

##### *Project design and start-up*

Slow start-up – the initial stage of the project leading up to starting implementation of activities in the communities was long, influenced by community pace, government bureaucracy, and design factors.

Dispersed and remote communities – the selection of provinces, districts and communities was based on vulnerability criteria; it resulted in a very dispersed set of communities, some of which are quite remote from provincial and district headquarters towns. While this was able to test project strategies in highly vulnerable communities, it also constrained the process and cost of monitoring and follow-up.

Small scale of the project – this was a pilot project, which was carried out with very modest inputs and short duration; as such, it was difficult to resolve some of the expectations of various stakeholders, some of which were just not compatible with the resources available, e.g., solving fundamental problems of poverty at sub-district level or testing systems adequately to be sure about expansion potentials.

#### *Sectoral/intersectoral collaboration*

Low involvement by sectors – some felt that there had been little success in developing participation, collaboration, co-ordination, and financial support from sectors involved with development, especially during implementation. In part, this was attributed to low political will at local levels, and partly to the rapid turnover of key government officials.

Lack of integration of sectors into the project - The focus of this project was clearly based at community level and working upwards to the sectors rather than a top-downwards approach working through the sectors to the community. This community-based approach, which is a bit unconventional in Iran, did result in some concern by some sectors that they had not been invited (or enabled) to create a framework for people's participation.

While some government sectors were concerned about the capacity of the community to participate and contribute, some community members were at least as concerned about the government's capacity to participate and listen.

***We have had differences of opinion with the Ministry of Agriculture about placement of irrigation project and water point. Ministry wants to put it some place that the community knows and has told them will cause problems, but the ministry says that because they are paying the bill, they can decide.*** (Bar Aftab, community animator).

#### *Support and follow-up*

Guidance – there were objections by some respondents to the choices made by the project communities, e.g., locating a store in Oraman where there are already other stores instead of putting in a more remote village. This disparity of perceptions suggests that more information sharing about the project at district and provincial level is probably needed.

NGO and donor support – there were some complaints that the implementing NGO had an unorganised approach in the implementation of the project. 'Unorthodox' might have been a better way to express the observation that the group did not lay out a refined programme of work, preferring to move at the pace of the community – which is not the usual practice in government or at UNICEF. On a related note, there was some concern expressed to the review team about the sufficiency of knowledge in the project group regarding local culture and traditions. Rather than a question of cultural sensitivity, this may actually have been another manifestation of insufficient communication about the project to the sectoral staff as the project had used experienced cultural and anthropological experts from the beginning, plus permanent local advisors from each region.

Books - During visits to the community libraries, it was found that there were no books in the libraries on development activities. This may partially reflect the agencies involved in the original choice of books – UNICEF and the Ministry of Education. But it also reflects on some gaps in the awareness of the value of this resource to the community by the implementing team and the government sectors.

Monitoring and information gathering – some respondents were concerned that there was no formal baseline household survey in each village at the beginning of the project, with local objectives linked to the baseline findings. While this concern discounts the value of the qualitative, self-generated 'baseline' prepared by the animators and communities themselves, it does highlight a concern among some of the ministry decision-makers about having some consistent indicators against which comparisons can be made later for tracking achievements.

Some respondents felt that there had been inadequate monitoring during the implementation of the project. In part, this was due to a limited number of visits made to the villages during the project lifespan, caused by distance and cost. In part, there was also relatively little participatory monitoring by the communities, which is perhaps not surprising in such a young project. The implementing agency had not yet undertaken work with the communities on indicators and strategies for participatory monitoring, and most the community energy had gone into implementation.

*Sustainability*

Management capacity – There was concern about the capacity of communities to calculate income and follow through on commitments to use 20% for development projects. Formal accountability for income and expenses has been relatively weak in some of the communities, however, most of these communities had been implementing for considerably less than even one financial year – and the statutes of the sanduqs only expect that the 20% is to be calculated at the end of the financial year.

Access to markets – in the face of increasing local capacity for production (e.g., shoes, vegetables, animals), there is a shortage of linkages to markets outside of the immediate vicinity of the project communities, which is a constraint to their income generating potential. As a related issue, some (or most) of the income/wealth generating activities that have been initiated so far are seasonal, and there is concern about the capacity of communities and households to generate and manage their income appropriately to cover the whole year.

Cultural values – It has proven quite difficult to develop very equal participation levels for women versus men. The strategies developed by the project are not uniformly successful, and in some areas, values about gender are so deeply entrenched that it appears solvable only in the very long term.

Opportunities and resources – human resources, partnerships, alternative funds*Human resources*

This project has demonstrated that there are many people available and interested in this kind of project, from the residents of the communities, to individual technical staff in the various development and service sectors, to members of private and public companies. There are many young people with and without education who are ready to work and participate in developing their villages. Local communities are enthusiastic to improve and continue the project, and women are also interested and even eager to participate. Many resource people are present in the communities, and can be mobilised, e.g., behvarz, teachers, village council members, and other local leaders including religious leaders.

*Partnerships and sectoral/institutional collaboration*

In multisectoral meetings, government sectors expressed strong interest at the district level for participation with local communities in their development, including supporting the sanduqs. It is important to also note the existence of an appropriate environment in the country for participation, given the existence of supporting government policies, including Islamic Village Councils.

The levels of local interest and information sharing around project communities have demonstrated the possibility of expanding the model to adjoining areas through local community organizations and local efforts. This is another area where the supporting sanduq idea is applicable, i.e., sanduqs located in a regional marketing centre or sub-district/district headquarters that have a more skilled co-ordinator and can provide assistance to multiple village level groups.

*Alternative sources of funds*

Much as this project has been able to benefit from the input by UNICEF, such funds are limited and time-bound, and quite inadequate in comparison with the needs of the rural and poor areas of the country. During the evaluation, respondents identified several alternative sources of funds that could be tapped for future work, either in the existing areas or for expansion/extension to new areas; these included public and private sector, as well as additional income generation schemes.

Threats and constraints – needs and expectations

Magnitude of need - Needs are much greater than readily available local resources in the project communities, which were largely selected because of their poverty. People have demonstrated capacity to think about their problems, and to develop solutions for them, but lack sufficient means at hand to rapidly address the problems. Some areas have made a start, but are constrained by access problems, e.g., wintertime in Oraman, or a road to the sea in Siromj.

Government is sometimes hamstrung in its capacity to help because of all the rules and regulations of bureaucracy; support is tied to plans, but there are no development plans articulated for sub-district and village levels. In addition, at the present time, the district governor's offices also do not keep a

notebook or file with written descriptions of all the kinds of funds available to communities and their regulations, e.g., amounts, criteria for obtaining, or other guidelines.

Expectations – In the face of overwhelming need, it is not surprising perhaps that both communities and stakeholders have had very high expectations of the project. Sometimes communities have seen a window of hope and then expected immediate resolution of all the community problems, complaining that the donated funds were too small. On the other side, some respondents from the community and implementing agency felt that the government and funder expectations of achievements were too high within the very short lifespan of the project.

Although generally there was a lot of goodwill toward and within the project, there were several areas of potential conflict that could be difficult – within the present areas or in new areas. One of the most prominent was between the project and the co-operatives sector, due to overlapping but not entirely synchronous interests. The co-operatives staff believed that development resources should flow through their offices, whereas the project was demonstrating success by giving community control of such resources.

### **Lessons learnt – for the future**

#### Expansion/extension

This pilot project has developed and tested one general approach to community development, that is, training and support to local animators leading to community wealth generating organisations – sanduqs – with a strong focus on participation, locally specific planning and implementation, economic sustainability, and improving the conditions of women and children. It has worked with one implementing NGO and a relatively small number of communities and individuals (animators and committees) for a rather short period of time (functionally implementing for little more than a year). The present project has been a small one, e.g., only three scattered villages out of 2000 villages in one province. The villages themselves are willing to help with sharing their experiences if it is extended, but they are unable to say whether it should be replicated or not. Some local authorities, e.g., in Kurdistan, are very interested in how the project can be extended to include a much larger number of communities in the existing districts.

#### Preconditions for replication and/or extension

Government links – stakeholders generally agreed that the community is capable, but they also recognised that some linkages are needed with authorities at the next level up in order to support and co-ordinate any extension. There were debates, however, about the extent to which this linkage will need to be institutionalised and co-ordinated in order to achieve success when expanding.

Selection of villages – several respondents urged that in future, project areas should be selected to include contiguous communities, in ways that encourage the support of different sectors as well as mutual reinforcement among communities. At the same time, there was concern not to ignore the fact that one of the factors contributing to high levels of achievement in the ABP has been the requirement for and subsequent demonstration of commitment by the participating communities.

#### Sustainability

Current locations - The future situation is not yet clear for the existing 15 communities participating in this project. At this stage, they are still nascent as self-sustaining development agents. They are only beginning to find their own strengths, to make their own linkages with sectors and to establish independent sources of funds (either from their community investments or through engaging co-funding from others). Respondents at central level, e.g., MoH and UNICEF were wondering how soon it would be possible to stop support to this project in order to support other areas/other projects. Respondents at community and sub-district level were wondering how long the support could be maintained in order to facilitate consolidation and ensure sustainability of their work.

While both sides acknowledge that participatory processes take a lot of time, neither side has yet sorted out appropriate indicators for sustainability (of planning, activities, human resources/capacity, and financial capability) or the timeliness for discontinuing external support. Potential ideas include:

- To what extent local institutions are capable of carrying on
- People's level of confidence and trust in their future
- When 'good' results are reached by the communities

Strategies of support - Three main strategies of support to continue participatory community development were identified by participants during the fieldwork for the evaluation. These included:

- a) External support to government for local activities, e.g., from UNICEF.
- b) Move government resources out to the communities, and give communities a stronger voice in the use of those resources for direct problem-solving. Respondents emphasised finding mechanisms to facilitate the community, e.g., by allocating some government resources to community funds for local budgeting and community management of their own plans.
- c) Advocacy for distributive justice, e.g., ensuring that the needs of the vulnerable are really attended to within the community and the region.

#### Capacity building

Communities and stakeholders exhibited a lot of enthusiasm for capacity building and training, believing that increasing awareness and knowledge would contribute to better unity in the communities and more effective implementation of community plans. Some of the requests and recommendations for capacity building were generic, e.g., putting up a training and workshop facility in the community that could be used by men, women, and adolescents/youth for learning and using various skills. Other requests (mostly from community respondents) were for specific content on topics ranging from rights to income generation. Another aspect of capacity building that was reiterated in various communities was a request for more books for the small community libraries.

#### Planning and co-ordination

**Focal point community** – Most respondents were impressed with community planning and implementing capabilities and recommended that the focal point for development planning should be at community level. While the emphasis was on community-based planning, there was also a strong recognition that government does have a role and that it needs co-ordination.

**Focal point government** – One part of the debate about government's role in co-ordination was linked to concerns about supervision. Sectoral people within government have had a tendency to believe that it is their role to supervise, and they have seen supervision as a technical support issue. Others, such as the implementing NGO, have argued that technical support can come in the form of advice, but the core issue is collaboration in management to capitalise on the strengths of community, government and other participating stakeholders. This approach requires the participation of government with its technical skills, but does not presuppose that government is automatically more knowledgeable than the community about the local situation.

**Support requested/recommended from specific sectors** - Community members had ideas already about which sectors they would like to work with and get more support from. There is a wide range of specific opportunities for sectoral links with priority needs of the communities. Among the sectors and governmental bodies listed were: Health, Education, District governor, Fishery corporation, Physical education office, Water and waste water corporation, and Ministry of Jihad (details of opportunities identified in full report).

### **Recommendations**

**Continuity** – A continuity strategy should be developed in partnership with the communities, with government representatives responsible for those communities, and with the implementing NGO.

**Replication** – this project should be seriously considered for emulating in other areas of Iran, including the promotion of community animators, bottom-up planning, sanduq development committees with community investment funds and local wealth generating activities.

**Selection of communities** – consider working with entire administrative units, e.g., sub-districts. This will require a collaborative team (with community and sectoral representatives) to work out a strategy for identifying administrative units in need, and then clarifying those units that can go further to make commitments to the project, and what the nature of their commitment and contribution would be in order to become recognised as collaborative development partners.

**Monitoring** - monitoring in participatory projects like the ABP to include:

- The objectives of the project to be carefully followed up and regularly monitored, since positive outcomes will strengthen good ideas
- Creating opportunities to discuss the projects, analyse achievements, study and evaluate them at specific intervals by the communities themselves
- Appropriate initial assessment in order to identify precise strategies and the role of monitoring and evaluation at every stage

**Accountability to communities about finances** – consider more community meetings, or possibly a visible posting of on-going (e.g., monthly) income and expenses, perhaps with simple charts using symbols that are easily understood by all, including non-literates.

**Improving government links/support** - register the Sanduq to get recognised by government. In addition, in order to improve government support to participatory community development projects:

- Eliminate unsatisfactory practices of government agencies
- Ease government bureaucracy and make regulations more flexible in such projects so that the government sectors can easily work with project implementers
- Create opportunities for the participation of other interested and effective sectors

**Library support** - Mobilise books, handouts, and other materials for the community libraries that teach about development, e.g., books on poultry rearing, irrigation, or improving agriculture. Such documents could come from government sectors, universities, national and international agencies.

**Alternative sources of funds** - project communities to work on accessing various additional funds to address community priorities, rather than being dependent on a single project such as the ABP. Advocate for channelling government funds through the sanduq rather than holding them at central level to increase local capital.

## Options for the future

For the present three province area-based project (15 villages)

- Continue longer
- Consider what inputs needed for the present project to advance
- Consider ways to work with the present project longitudinally

For any extension, e.g., with the disparity reduction project (5 provinces)

- Consider a phased approach
- Consider multiple implementing groups
- Build in a regular review process

Exploratory work

- Try a similar exercise in one or more subdistricts
- Gather more information about participatory work in Iran

## Note on methodology used in the ABP evaluation

### Main approaches

This was a very participatory evaluation, both in the members of the team (which included all three key stakeholders – MoH, UNICEF and CENESTA), and in the techniques that were used for information gathering about the project. The principal methods were as follows:

- Semi-structured interviews – list of topics/themes to explore; with stakeholders, gatekeepers, and residents, both male and female
- Focus group – assigning discussion about a set of topics or guiding questions, and then handing over to the community; followed by discussion with probes; conducted with men and women separately; occasionally with youth
- Village walkabout – viewing achievements and problems in the community; seeing aspects of everyday community life; conducted with community animator/co-ordinator and some residents
- Participatory observation – eating and sleeping in the community, using community facilities; seeing their shops, storerooms, latrines, homes, etc.
- Participatory plenary/large focus group meeting with multiple stakeholders (using idea cards); conducted with sectoral and intersectoral groups plus community animators and co-ordinators
- Documents review (for materials available in English)

### Specific techniques/tools in groups (summary)

- SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) and SW/R (strengths, weaknesses and recommendations); focused on the ABP project. Note that the weaknesses often yielded unmet needs in the community level discussions.
- Collaborative review of community documents (maps and action plans) – discussing point by point about what has changed or been achieved since the documents were originally prepared
- Social group assessment – free listing of groups, age/gender of members, size of membership, main activities and link to Sanduq
- Participatory mapping of resources and risks in the community – multiple persons contributing to the drawing simultaneously (e.g., with boys in Lenj Abad).
- Decision-making – free listing of decisions being made, who is the leader/main decision-maker, and other participants; recommendations for improved decision-making. Much of the recommendations had to do with specific decisions.
- Benefit/harms or risks analysis – for decisions that were difficult that the community wanted to make, e.g., how to compensate an animator.
- Indicator analysis – identification and prioritisation (based on feasibility and sensitivity) of indicators for children and women well-being and for Sanduq committee performance. Free listing for identification, with probes and suggestions of additional ideas by various experts after the community puts theirs up first. Prioritisation using buzz groups for discussion (allows similar categories of people to work together, helps ensure there are enough people talking together that at least one is literate enough to record the results of the discussion), with contributions by the community residents first, confirmed as to whether the same issue is present on the lists of any other groups, and then followed by additional items from the lists of the other (non-community) participants.

### General comment on participatory tools

Communities generally responded very positively to the variety of participatory tools that were utilised in the evaluation/assessment. In addition, the stakeholders (UNICEF, MoH, and CENESTA) were all quite eager to learn new participatory methods when we tried them out for these settings.

## Background – to project and evaluation

### Project background (from ToRs)

The Area-Based Development project up to the point of the evaluation had been implemented with funding from the UNICEF Country Programme for the Islamic Republic of Iran. The project has been implemented by the Centre for Sustainable Development and Environment (CENESTA) with the Co-operation of the Universities of Medical Sciences of the Provinces of Hormozgan, Kohgiluyeh-Boyer-Ahmad, Kurdistan (Ministry of Health and Medical Education).

After some initial surveys and contacts carried out by CENESTA, the two-year project officially began in August 1998, with the signature of the project document. The project was expected to last two years, until July 2000.

The evaluation to be carried out in 2000 will:

- a) Assess the process, results and impacts so far achieved;
- b) Assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the adopted strategic approach; and provide recommendations to UNICEF, CENESTA, the project institutional partners and the beneficiary communities for optimising the project impacts and pursuing lessons learned in all appropriate contexts.

The Area-based project is to be evaluated in terms of process, outputs and impact on the health and well-being of women and children in the fifteen pilot communities. It is to also be evaluated regarding the surrounding conditions that may foster or impede the sustainability of the achieved gains. Quantitative and qualitative indicators and lessons learned are to be identified and assessed in field-based conditions. A participatory evaluation approach should be adopted, involving all major project stakeholders: donors, implementers, partners and beneficiary communities. [See Annex 3 for full ToRs].

## Core elements and aims of the project

### Objectives of the project (project document)

3. To plan and carry out demonstration projects in three provinces of Iran with the specific aims of: protecting and promoting the rights of children and women; improving their health and well-being; and reducing regional disparities with national indicators.
4. To ensure that objective 1, once achieved, will remain self-sustainable beyond the life of the project. That is, issues of child and woman well-being will be addressed within the framework of an integrated and participatory area-based programme.

### Implementation strategy

To reach the above objectives, the project adopted a framework of working principles (cultural respect, transparency, mutual trust, sustainability, etc.) and a strategic approach focused on integrated, participatory community development for the creation of local sustainable wealth and capacities.

The project designers report that they started from the premise that they wanted to help create a mechanism that would work in parallel with the official mechanism and yet be independent of it – so that the two systems could have a symbiotic relationship. Their idea was to empower beneficiary communities with the means to make provisions for their own livelihoods and eventually be able to act independently from the official mechanism in order to make long-term plans for the common and direct benefit of the community. As such, the idea of “sanduqs” was embraced as the best venue for such empowerment. In other words, the sanduqs were created as the backbone of the overall project.

Community organising and empowerment, wealth generation and sustainable management of natural resources are thus the three strategic pillars of the project in supporting enhanced awareness and action for women and child health and well-being.

Reviewer commentary

The objectives reflect a mixture of outputs and outcomes, some of which were probably realistic and appropriate to aim at in the course of the two-year project, and other parts were not very realistic.

**Objective 1** - Carrying out demonstration projects is an output, and reasonable within two years, also relevant according to the lack of related experiences in Iran to date. Improving health and well-being is desirable, though if it is to be quantified and therefore more objective, it needs to be linked with specific indicators and a pre/post measurement process – which is not very realistic in a relatively small two year project. Reducing regional disparities is also highly unlikely in a small, two-year project, working with isolated communities - though one could see some testing of ideas that might possibly be able to be taken to a larger scale for another level of testing probably for a longer period, after which one might begin to think about achieving or assessing significant regional change.

**Objective 2** – the first half of this objective describes a desirable outcome, i.e., self-sustainable change. First of all, this is generally quite hard to achieve in the space of two years in most development work, as it is generally dependent on significant behaviour changes in communities and sometimes many other factors that are not necessarily completely under the control of the project. Secondly, as will be noted later in this review, the actual period of field implementation was much shorter than two years at the time of the review and the project was still in a relatively ‘early’ stage of implementation – making the assessment of ‘sustainability’ rather tenuous. The second half of this objective is actually an implementation strategy, rather than an outcome.

**Implementation strategy** - The Sanduqs are a remarkable, and highly effective innovation in the Iran setting and are discussed at greater length later in this review. They fit very well the intended approach emphasising cultural sensitivity, transparency, and participation. As such, they appear to be not only viable, but also to have a high potential for sustainability.

## Context and setting

This section will give the perceptions of the various respondents/participants about the context in which the ABP project has been developed and implemented. There are also some other excellent resource documents about poverty and disparity in Iran (see examples in the references annex). The main sub-headings in this section are:

- Problems - Poverty and disparity
- Resources – In and out of the community

### ***Problems – Poverty, disparity in access to services and resources***

#### Poverty

The theme of poverty was recurrent in the project areas, which was to be expected since that had been one of the key criteria in their selection for the project. Many communities linked their poverty to unemployment, especially for young people.

***We are poor; there are no jobs in the village and a lot of unemployed youth.*** (Bar Aftab village, men)

There are many barriers to employment in the rural areas, one of which is education, but not all of the unemployment is blamed on this factor. Often the range of available occupations for persons residing in the community is severely limited, e.g., camel herding or working as fishermen in a nearby community for the men in Siromj village.

***Our community has 400 youth (15-25 years old) and some people are getting worried about their future. Fifty have a high school diploma, and four have a BS degree. All of this group is jobless.*** (Naw village, men)

As a consequence of poverty, many people in rural communities want improvement of their conditions and are willing to work hard toward that end. However, the poverty is a constraining factor inducing a

desire for immediate solutions and unwillingness or inability to invest in solutions that take time to mature.

***We need employment guidance. Poor people can't wait for bread to come out of the oven, and so they eat it uncooked; rich people can afford to wait for the wheat to grow.*** (Oraman village, religious leader)

The project has also found that the education system is alienating young people from their rural way of life. Young people in rural areas hope to continue their education and pursue occupations that are generally urban, such as engineer, accountant, etc. In answer to the question 'what do you want to do when you grow up?' young persons in rural communities hardly ever answer that they choose to traditional village occupations.

#### "Remote" residence

Poor access to transport and roads compounds difficulties with local income generation and creation of employment.

***We cannot get goods to urban markets due to bad roads and high transport costs. Taking produce to Marivan costs 7-10,000 Tumans for a pick-up, twice as much in winter if the road is passable at all. Oraman is about 60 kms from Marivan and gets cut off from the city in the wintertime.*** (Oraman village, Animator)

The difficulties with access affect other aspects of quality of life as well as the economic element.

***We have the problem of being locked in, like being in prison, in the winter time (causing a feeling of) deprivation. The biggest problem is environment/nature.*** (Oraman village, religious leader)

#### Shifting residence (transhumance)

Some of the selected communities carry on an old tradition of transhumance, shifting residence seasonally to accommodate the needs of their animals that are their principal source of food and income.

***This is the summering area; some people have permanent housing in this area, and a few families stay year round. The winter area is lower, warmer, and formerly was only tents – but now some people stay there year round and have more permanent dwellings. We move twice per year between the different villages – and the animals have to walk, which takes about four days.*** (Amir-Abad village, mixed group of men and women)

There are several difficulties associated with this lifestyle, including having to invest in two sets of residences, including two sets of sanitation facilities, clean kitchen areas, etc. There are also difficulties with ensuring sectoral investments and services in multiple locations, e.g., Naw village only has a school in the winter community.

#### Access to education

While national studies confirm increasing levels of education in the country, there were obvious disparities in the programme communities. For example, in Siromj village, out of the 15 men in the community discussion group, only one was fully literate.

Primary schools were usually present in the communities, but not always in good condition (e.g., in Bar Aftab, there were no toilets at the school; in Surgalm, the toilets had been non-functional for years and the school offered little protection from rain or cold weather). Guidance (middle level) and secondary schools were generally located quite far from the communities, posing a barrier of distance and cost to higher education for the rural pupils.

***Right now, the children attending secondary school have to go and live in town, which is expensive.*** (Amir-Abad village)

Girls' education was generally weaker even than that for boys. Girls tended to be held at home and then married relatively younger than the males (e.g., girls at about age 17-18 in Baghan)

#### Access to water – crops, people

Access to water for drinking and health purposes, as well as for crops and animals, is often insecure or not assured of sustainability in the programme areas. In Bar Aftab village, the village animators

complained of community pessimism and reluctance to plan for the future due to the chronic problems of water shortages.

***Drought has been an issue for the past two years. It means no water for planting, and a lot of unemployment for women. There is also lowering of the water table due to a lot of private tube wells. We have access at a couple of wells, but lack pipes/plumbing. We have written up a proposal for coping with this issue, but the cost would be in the range of US\$40,000 – which is more than we can afford.*** (Amir-Abad village, Animators)

Even in areas with piped water, the supplies were insecure.

***Our community does not have safe drinking water. This area has water, but it has been cut to receiving water only three days in a month.*** (Gohert village, mixed group)

In some areas, like Naw, there were problems controlling the flow and use of water in the village, leading to disputes and waste of time in queues. Other villages, like Oraman, also suffer with difficulties in balancing the water needs of the people against the crops and animals.

***We have had no choice but to bring irrigation water up to supply the town, e.g., schools and homes. Historically, irrigation water went to the gardens, but there are more and more people here and they wanted to be comfortable, so less water for the orchards – and some have dried up. Originally, there was no diversion of water in the summer time; it all went to the orchards. Now, the water even comes to the village in the summer.*** (Oraman village, animator and men group)

#### Sanitation and solid waste management

Disposal of human wastes (sewerage) is commonly recognised as a problem; and communities have linked it to poverty-related issues such as income, education and ethnicity.

***About 60% of the homes here do not have toilets. The persons least likely to have toilets are the poorest, and least well off. Illiteracy is also a risk factor for not having toilets. The public facilities, schools and mosque, do have toilets and they are working. The black community is the most vulnerable and deprived, having the least toilets and worst health.*** (Gohert village, animator)

Solid wastes were amassing continuously in the villages, generally with little effort to control them, despite a popular recognition that the rubbish constitutes a health and well-being problem. In Lenj Abad village, some of the leading health risks identified by children were garbage, broken glass and sharp metal fragments littering the village and especially some areas in the middle of the community.

#### Constraints affecting access to health care

In spite of remarkable national achievements in access to health services, low coverage was still a problem in many of the programme communities. In some communities, there was no behvarz at all, and the nearest health unit was 10 kms or more away (e.g., Surgalm). In others, there was only one health worker for large numbers of people. In such settings, it is not possible for the behvarz to visit every single household as per the national plans and policies.

***Health risks are there, and waiting can be too late. We have only one behvarz and his wife for 800 HHs (about 3500 people).*** (Oraman village, VC leader)

When local services are few, cost and distance are almost insurmountable barriers to health care.

***The doctor has been taken away, so there is no doctor in the rural health centre. Affairs depend on comfort-seeking government employees, and we are at the furthest point from them. We have to go to the nearest town for health care, which is actually in Iraq (7-8 hours on foot). It is cheaper than going to Marivan. We can get an operation for 7-8,000 Tumans in Iraq; same operation costs 60-80,000 Tumans in Marivan. These are official prices and one can get a receipt. Just transporting a patient to Marivan is 10-15,000 Tumans one way.*** (Oraman village, Religious leader)

One contributing factor affecting health worker coverage in the programme areas has been the difficulty in recruiting female students into health careers. This has been linked to poverty, poor education, and traditional/cultural values.

***Tradition limits girls' education, and therefore the females eligible for behvarz training – since it requires literacy.*** (Gohert village)

Sometimes women or girls will be nominated but not allowed to travel to the training venues, e.g., Surgalm and the Jask area. The gender barriers also have an impact on the services rendered in the communities, increasing the risks for maternal mortality.

***Women getting sick have problems going to the male behvarz. The male behvarz cannot speak easily with women on confidential female issues. There are traditional midwives, but they are not very hygienic. (Gohert village)***

#### Health and nutrition status

Despite national level successes in the improvement of health and nutrition, there are still many poverty and deprivation concerns related to these issues in the rural areas selected by this programme. Medical people were worried by problems of poor nutrition related to insufficient variety in the diet. The consequences of these problems include anaemia and stunting of child growth.

***Anaemia is a problem in these villages. I give iron tablets, but there is not enough variety in the diet; malnourished mothers are affecting the children. (Bar Aftab village, female behvarz)***

***Stunting is a problem, especially in the Jask area. People use the fish, but have few fruits and vegetables. Traditional beliefs are also a factor, e.g., people oppose giving eggs to children under 2-3 years of age. (Bandar-Abbass, PMD)***

#### Access to animal health services

In communities dependent on animals, low access to animal health services is also linked with poverty – both as cause/contributing factor and effect.

***The main problems of the community include camel diseases (fever and diarrhoea leading to death). There are treatments, and possibly preventives, but they are not easily available for the poor persons in this community. (Siromj village)***

## **Resources – in and out of the community**

### **Councils**

#### Village councils

It was widely acknowledged that village councils have been mandated in the national constitution for some time, but only established during the present Khatami government for most villages. As such, not all areas have managed to set up the councils, and where they do exist, many of them are still feeling their way for how to co-ordinate development, especially with little local capital. Some areas are, of course, further advanced than others.

***About half of the villages in the district have village councils, but not all – due to low literacy and low number of women participating. (Surgalm village)***

At the present time, village councils link with sub-district governor's offices, and there is no council arrangement at the sub-district level – though there are provisions for such in the national constitution.

#### Health councils

According to the Dehdasht DHC, villages above 100 households have a local health council, selected by the community. The village behvarz is a member of the health council and is the one to train the council after it is selected. The local health council does not supervise the behvarz; that is done by the rural health centre. The local council gets some feedback from higher health councils, e.g., the district health council that includes the district governor. The local health councils are working with different sectors and getting involved with development.

### **Community based organisations (CBOs)**

Many organisations exist at community level serving a wide range of interests, e.g., religious groups, education and literacy improvement, income generation, civil leadership, gender interests, and others. A listing of social groups that meet and have some kind of organised activities was gathered from a focus group of men in Lenj Abad village. It helps to illustrate the richness of this level of social organisation in communities. (See methodology annex)

## Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

MoH - Modern NGOs only in the past 50 years or so. They have to be registered, transparent constitution, mandate indicated to the ministry

## Service sectors (government)

### Health services

Looking from the bottom up, the health system organisation is built on the behvarz system, which started some 20 years ago. The target for the behvarz system is a health house with two behvarz (one male, one female) for every village of 150 households or more. These health houses (and the behvarz) are expected to serve a cluster of villages around the base village where the health house is located. Districts are expected to make at least a monthly visit to the behvarz and health houses for supervision. The next level up from the behvarz is the rural and urban health centre, which is supposed to have doctors on staff. The behvarz system is considered by many to be the most complete infrastructure present out to village level, which is a key reason why the health sector was chosen as a parent sector for the Area Based Programme at the beginning.

### Access to education

Most communities have primary schools, even the relatively small ones. Some communities reported local or nearby construction of middle and upper level schools (guidance level and secondary schools), e.g., Bar Aftab and Lenj Abad. Adult literacy programmes had been started in almost all communities, though they were not always active depending on whether teachers were available.

### Access to utilities

Most of the programme communities (with the exception of some of the summer villages for the transhumanent groups) have access to electricity and water, which are managed by district level units.

## Information system

### Health data

According to the Dehdasht DHC, the village health councils have monthly meetings and report to the rural health centres. The collected monthly reports go to the urban health centre for analysis and report to the District Health Centre and one copy to the district governor's office. Various actions are taken on the basis of the information, e.g., reporting of broken water pipes, after which the council can negotiate with local water units for repairs.

The behvarz in each base village is expected to do an annual survey of all households in their catchment area, and then fill out a 'horoscope' to profile the health status and needs of their population.

### Community data

Some collection of community data other than health is also happening and is linked to the village council system, but this seems to be rather underdeveloped in many areas. [See discussion below about information related activities of the ABP]

## Programme activities/processes

The purpose of this section is to give room for the various respondents/participants to describe the most important activities and processes of the ABP project as it has been started. The main sub-headings in this section are:

- Organisation of the ABP project
- Preparatory activities – mobilising, capacity building, planning

## **Organisation of the ABP project**

### Origins of the project

The Ministry of Health and UNICEF initiated the Area Based Project together with CENESTA, an Iranian NGO, as the implementing body. The partners identified the problem of disparities in health and well-being and determined that it would be appropriate to start community-based initiatives directed toward overcoming these disparities. Their planning led to the present three province area-based project. The selection of districts and villages was based on disparities, looking in some of the lowest performing districts for regions that were in difficult situations with stakeholders interested to help bring about change. The project formally started 1½ years ago, with implementation beginning in villages about one year ago.

### Scope of ABP

According to the partners, there were many discussions at the beginning to develop the project, even heated discussions. The partners were interested in trying to build sustainable system, with no need to ask for money all the time. As CENESTA has put it, it is a process-oriented project that has been evolving based on the lessons learned from the communities. In the words of a UNICEF staff member, it has been an experimental, pilot project. As a Ministry of Health staff member put it in Yasuj, the project is based on traditions of co-operation and then assessing the capacity of villages for self-management.

The perceptions of the programme institutional partners about the focus of the programme emphasised critical concerns about participation, capacity building and improving the conditions of women and children.

***First and most important objective is participation.*** (Yasuj, MoH)

***Main objective was building capacity at the village first, not the system first.*** (CENESTA staff)

***The reason we were interested was poverty and inequality, with the ultimate objective of improving the well-being of women and children.*** (UNICEF staff)

### Stakeholder roles

The key stakeholders identified in this project were communities, local authorities, MoH, UNICEF and CENESTA. Regarding the roles of the various stakeholders, the role of community people has been pre-eminently important, with government as a facilitator. It has been a community project with stakeholders. Through the district network, there were links to district health. UNICEF gave seed money, but has not been implementing. Outside persons (i.e., staff of the implementing NGO, CENESTA) were only there as resources, as persons responding to direct questions. Decisions were being made by the community in a self-contained way. (Various sources, including Ministry of Health, CENESTA and UNICEF)

## **Preparatory activities – mobilising, capacity building, planning**

### **Mobilising**

#### Selection of local staff (animators)

Siromj village - The animator is male, an elderly man with very limited literacy; a camel herder by occupation, and a member of the village council. All members of the village council are supposed to be literate, but they stretched the point a bit for him because everyone likes him.

#### Sanduq (CBO) members

The participating communities were mobilised by the animators and encouraged to set up a general assembly for development issues. All households, without restriction, were urged to participate in the general assembly. Out of this group, the villages elected a Sanduq committee, usually consisting of about 10-15 members, and comprised of both men and women.

At the time of the evaluation, these committees were present, and generally active. In some areas, of course, they were more so than others. In Gohert village, the Sanduq started with 11 members, 3

stopped participating, and 8 are left. In Oraman, there is a 15 person Sanduq committee that includes three women.

## Capacity building

### Jask workshop (training, planning)

The first major collective activity of the project that drew together representatives from the various participating communities was a three-week workshop in Jask for the new village animators, facilitated by CENESTA. The meeting enhanced local decision making capability, obtained support from local authorities and met or addressed some important gender equity challenges.

As reported by various animators who attended the workshop, the project was presented as a blank sheet for them to fill in. The participants got knowledge and skills for problem identification, prioritisation, solution planning, and economic feasibility analysis. They had discussions about child rights, how to gather baseline information, preparing log frames and proposals. They also discussed and proposed by-laws for the sanduq organisations in their communities.

There were some visits from government people during the workshop – district government, sub-district, and the prayer leader. All persons in the workshop were encouraged to be active participants, and relished the experience. One of the women (Malik, the female animator from Surgalm) stood in front of the governor and spoke – which was a very new experience for most of the animators. Some of the animators were illiterate or only partially literate, but felt that they too were included and learned in the course of the meeting (e.g., Siromj, Oraman).

## Planning

### Community work (diagnosis, planning)

After the workshop, the animators returned to their communities to stimulate a series of activities culminating in a local plan. The animators started with a workshop to explain and brief the community on the things they had learned at the Jask workshop.

The animators then collected data by household interview, some key informant interviews, and some focus groups. Men, women, children separately listed and clustered and prioritised their issues and concerns. Men talked about men's problems; women talked of women's problems; but the children talked of both child and parent problems.

***In some of the very early sessions the project people were pushing the children away; until they remembered the project aimed at helping children, and then they were included to a greater extent. They did some participatory mapping, and then the adults started even respecting the children more. (Amir-Abad village, animator)***

Next, the community discussed possible solutions, their assets, and possibilities of resources locally and from outside the community. This was a time of planning and preparing multiple trial proposals at the village level. Many of the villages prioritised economic security as the first or principal problem affecting their well-being. In their subsequent planning, the animators and communities tried to find projects that would address multiple problems for the village, e.g., planting crops that could be used locally for improved nutrition as well as having commercial value.

### Proposal for UNICEF funds, organisation of sanduq

During the planning process, there were visits from CENESTA and UNICEF. As a result of these support visits, the community understood that they needed to have a direction of their own. They were stimulated to write specific proposals in line with the amount of the UNICEF contribution. In the process, everyone helped with the work, including the creation of community funds (Sanduqs).

UNICEF committed to giving seed money (2,000,000 Tumans) to the programme communities that would be based on local proposals. UNICEF recognised that economic projects were not an area of strength for their organisation, but were willing to contribute to a pilot project where communities prioritised economic needs. The UNICEF seed money was for community income generating activities with the understanding that 20% of the income generated would be used to improve the situation of women and children in the community. The proposal expectations of UNICEF were not too complicated, but it did have all the essential elements – what would be done, whom would it be for, etc.

After approving the proposal, UNICEF sent the money with the freedom that the community could revise the plan. Because a mechanism was required for handling the money, communities were requested to establish a bank account, which was an innovation for most of them. The UNICEF fund came to the account of the Sanduq community fund, was placed in the bank, and then they got a chequebook.

In addition to funds, the communities also received some additional 'in-kind' support from UNICEF and CENESTA. UNICEF facilitated donation of a library of 300 books for each participating community and CENESTA provided three solar cookers per community. Around the midpoint of the project, computers and printers were made available to the co-ordinating sanduqs (one per province) through UNICEF and the implementing NGO (CENESTA).

## Achievements/results

This section, which is considerably longer than either of the previous ones, presents respondent/participant perceptions of key activities and achievements for the project. Many of these are process level results, i.e., outputs and effect (behavioural and attitudinal) level changes as impacts are quite hard to discern in a project that has only been implemented at community level for a bit over a year. The organisation of the sections has been guided by a combination of the extensiveness of comments and the major elements of the project as it is being implemented. The main sub-headings in this section are:

- Participation – strengths and weaknesses
- Sectoral/intersectoral collaboration – strengths and weaknesses
- Planning
- Economic activities
- Transfer of ideas
- Education and child development
- Environment

### Participation

#### Participation – strengths

Respondents in the evaluation affirmed the participatory nature of the Area-Based Programme, and offered many indications of its participatory character and outcomes.

##### Attitudes and knowledge

Participating communities have felt more self-confidence as a consequence of the project activities, including training, analysis and practice of skills

***We did not know anything before the project, but now we know public health, and we are able to talk to and write to the governor.*** (Siromj village animator)

This change of attitude has manifested in greater self-reliance, which is increasingly evident to the other project partners as well.

***Self-confidence and belief in self is coming out for the communities. Even though people speak in simple language, yet they are able to express their concerns.*** (Yasuj PHO, Provincial Medical Officer)

It is also associated with a developing sense of ownership at community level.

***The people of Lenj Abad feel the Sanduq belongs to them. They show participation.*** (Lenj Abad animator, speaking at the Marivan District Governor's office)

##### Behaviour: planning and management

Observers reported that communities were doing more planning for themselves than they were capable of prior to the project. This is linked to their increasing capacity for analysis.

***One village did calculations about losses of worth to country for their time without water, based on interruption of agriculture, etc. (Yasuj co-ordinator)***

There is reportedly more group planning and discussion about issues of importance to the community.

***The sanduqs and communities had to build capacity to communicate about project ideas, e.g., communities now able to use log frame – which is not a small thing. (CENESTA staff)***

People are now co-operating in the sanduqs, and beginning to realise the capacity for generating community wealth rather than just individual gain.

***This ABP project has facilitated thinking and implementation of the water project by achieving a common purpose, and unity of thinking. We now have skills to do proposals. (Bar Aftab village)***

#### Behaviour: Local contributions/partnering

The injections of support and encouragement to plan in this project have indeed functioned as if a seed were being planted and nurtured.

***The village has more initiative due to the project. Contributions from the community have helped them to build their own football field, and they are now participating in football competitions in the local region. (Surgalm village)***

As a result of project involvement, another community was able to mobilise both local and governmental support to resolve an important local crisis.

***One of our irrigation ditches was destroyed by floods. We have contributed 800,000 Tumans from the village; and received 1,000,000 from the district government to also assist (based on a specific proposal). (Bar Aftab village)***

Not all of the community contributions have come in the form of money. In Lenj Abad, the community has been building toilets with a combination of Sanduq funds and other contributions from the community. In Surgalm, the number of latrines in the community has gone up from 7-8 latrines a year and a half ago to 23 or 24 at the present time.

***We do some projects without money, e.g., repair of the road, and we have worked on spring sanitation. (Naw village, men group and animator)***

### **Participation – weaknesses**

#### Capacity building and gender

As mentioned earlier, there have been difficulties with mobilising women in the project areas, as animators, members of the sanduq committees, and as health workers. For example, in Naw village, only the male animator went to the Jask training workshop. Meanwhile, project designers report that, at the outset, due to cultural sensibilities, they focussed on getting the participation of male community members. They felt that it was imperative to establish a degree of trust and confidence in these traditionally male dominated communities before seeking the involvement of female community members.

#### Accountability

Many of the sanduqs are being created in environments that are not accustomed to formal accounting, either because of limitations of literacy, or because collective enterprise has not often occurred in the past. Despite the limited background with formal accounting procedures, the sanduqs and the implementing agency report that the villagers have been able to devise accounting methods in order to maintain the sanduqs. This approach to building on indigenous understanding has a strong advantage in participatory 'ownership' of the accounting. At the same time, however, it can also potentially introduce difficulties with inconsistency of approaches and thereby affect monitoring by the co-ordinating sanduqs or the implementing agency.

A second issue is that the accountability system at the present time seems to be set up on an annual basis, which may not be adequate for communicating with the participating communities and ensuring their continued confidence in the system.

***Not sure where the sanduq money is going and how much money is available. Our financial year starts in March, and there has been no accounting yet, but we still feel that if the Sanduq gets going, the people will benefit.*** (Oraman, village council and sanduq member)

***The sanduq is not transparent about income; we need to know what resources are available.*** (Bar Aftab village members)

Care is needed to be sure that the system is adequately transparent for all community members to understand and to ensure that the sanduq leaders remain accountable and good guardians of their communities' interests. This may require more community meetings, or possibly a visible posting of on-going (e.g., monthly) income and expenses, perhaps with simple charts using symbols that are easily understood by all, including non-literates.

#### Preventive health and environmental sanitation behaviour

Some latrines were reportedly built in most of the villages, and attributed to the inputs of the project. However, the achievements in this area were often lower than what the animators and co-ordinators desired for the communities.

***I feel that achievements in this area are low. Only perhaps 15 toilets have been built during the lifespan of the project.*** (Gohert village animator)

According to the project implementers, this may represent overly high aspirations by the community animators and co-ordinators. The biggest problem with the latrines was in the Jask region where the outhouse has been modelled after the Pakistani outhouse. The project was not financially equipped to take on such an expensive undertaking. The project planners note that this phase of the project did not have the means to promote alternative latrines, and to teach the Jask community alternative latrine methodology. As such, the provision of latrines was not a part of the UNICEF sponsored component of this project. Instead, it was being considered as an intervention to be undertaken during a second phase of the project. The planners have also noted that the Government is well equipped and has the financial means to take on such an endeavour.

Many of the rural villages complained of solid waste (rubbish) build-up in their communities, but rather than organising local clean-up arrangements, they were waiting for/expecting sectoral assistance for mechanised clean-ups, similar to those occurring in urban areas.

## **Sectoral/Intersectoral collaboration**

Although intersectoral support was implied by the objectives of the programme, it was not explicitly stated. According to some project respondents, this was intentional in order to break the vertical model of previous community projects (CENESTA). This perception contributed to the blank page concept that was used in the initial animator workshop at Jask. Meanwhile, the intention to foster multisectoral collaboration was described in the overall goals and guiding principles of the project (See project document, page 10)

During the implementation, the programme workers encouraged and facilitated the process of developing contacts with local authorities, especially sub-district and district governors. These authorities, in turn, were able in some areas to facilitate intersectoral linkages, e.g., with water, agriculture, social affairs, co-operatives, fisheries, etc.

### **Strengths of sectoral/Intersectoral collaboration**

#### Awareness of the project

Some government sectors in the programme districts/provinces are quite aware of the programme. At an intersectoral meeting in Yasuj, both the doctor and the environmental officer had visited the project settings/villages. The environmental officer said that he had received intersectoral problem lists from the communities. The social affairs sector also reported intersectoral collaboration and said they were well informed about the project and its processes.

#### Behaviour: examples of sectoral collaboration with villages

Water - In Bar Aftab village, a water project was carried out jointly between the community and the district government. As a consequence of the project, the community is now able to plant and irrigate many more crops than they could previously.

Agriculture – in Surgalm village, a female extension worker has been working with households to promote domestic gardens that are protected from animals and utilising wastewater from homes. The ABP project team has facilitated this linkage, and many families in the community have adopted the practice. Members of the project team initiated the process and encouraged local authorities to provide housing for the female extension worker.

Health and nutrition – in Bar Aftab village, the female behvarz reported that the project deals with children and women through training the people related to their health and nutrition needs and what should be done, including for perinatal care.

Communications – in Oraman village, the sanduq bought a copier as an income generating activity, but have already found that it is perhaps even more useful in solving problems of registering children for school. In Surgalm and Lenj Abad, the community has been able to get a telephone line to the village, and have now set up a communication centre in their villages.

Local infrastructure – in Surgalm village, increasing organisation of the community has influenced completion of a road to the sea, as well as bringing the fisheries corporation out to their village to establish an office.

Local administration – in all of the villages, all the key members of the local village councils are on the executive committee of the sanduq. This helps in co-ordination of local development projects.

### **Weaknesses of sectoral/Intersectoral collaboration**

#### Co-ordination

It was reported that sectoral co-ordination rests with the sub-district and district governors' offices. There is no collective forum at which village/community issues are routinely presented to and input received from multiple sectors under the governors. In Jask and Marivan, the district governors accommodated the project team's request to convene the Administrative Council (intersectoral) in order to discuss issues as they arose with community animators and members of the project team. While this system was helpful, and occurred more than once, it was only convened on an ad hoc basis when and if it was necessary.

***Facilitator takes problem to the sectors, but no one pushes the agencies to visit and make them help.*** (Yasuj PHO, Environment officer)

The combination of these factors means that the extent of co-ordination varies considerably from one area to another, depending on the interest of the governors and their duration in office (which was sometimes preciously short before they were transferred or moved to other areas). As a result, although there has been collaboration of some sectors with villages, but it was hard to find evidence of simultaneous collaboration between multiple sectors with the same villages. This is a difficult situation to resolve in a project as short as two years; changing institutional behaviours is not a quick process.

Similarly, follow-up out to village level by sectoral staff was limited, including by members of the health sector higher than behvarz level – except in times of crisis. For example, during a cholera outbreak, the sectoral health workers collaborated with members of the project team to provide cholera education to affected communities.

#### Behaviour: examples of weaknesses in sectoral collaboration from specific sectors

There was some collaboration in some villages, but many communities still have problems that have not been solved. Community funds are being used to do what they can locally, but many sectors seem more concerned about other problems.

#### Water

The development of piped water supplies in many areas has helped improve the quality of water, but it has also been associated with dependency on the water department, which may not have the capacity to respond effectively to community needs.

***The water department comes only if they drag someone from the water and wastewater department to the village. Recently, they went for 13 days with no water at all. The village council is unable to coerce the water department staff to come. (Surgalm village elders)***

### Agriculture

The department of agriculture is willing to fund some irrigation projects, but their technical capacity does not always seem to include the capacity to respond to local socio-cultural and political concerns.

***The village drafted a proposal in writing for an irrigation project that included costing. After this, the technical officer for agriculture came to the village and made some adjustments. The local measurement of land was different than that of the technical person. This led to arguments since he did not understand the local requirements and concerns for balancing social groups. (Bar Aftab village men)***

### Sanitation and health

As with agriculture, the concerns of the technical health staff are not always congruent with community concerns.

***We have been speaking to the villages about animal waste, but the community responds that what they need is water and that animal waste is a fertiliser. (Yasuj PHO, health staff)***

### Child welfare

Several of the communities that had been stimulated by the child welfare workshop felt frustrated due to lack of support from the child welfare sector.

***For our day care centre, the welfare organisation requires certain standards for the building that are difficult, and therefore we have not been able to get money from them. (Bar Aftab village animator)***

***To assist our child activities, we came to the welfare organisation, who promised to send us some materials and expert assistance, but it has not happened. I rented a room at my own expense (because there is no balance sheet yet for the Sanduq) but the welfare organisation told me not to open it until it has been inspected, and they have not come to do the inspection. Despite my letters, they have not come, not even one visit. (Oraman village animator)***

## **Planning**

### **Local workplans for the first project year**

The project villages shared a common short-term plan for 1999 that contained 14 items that could perhaps be clustered into four broad categories as follows<sup>2</sup>:

#### Organisational capacity building (and training)

- Activate the female animator
- Helping set up local CBO, i.e., the Sanduq
- Elaboration of a local action plan
- Setting up library and development house

#### Household livelihood/well-being support

- Starting IGAs in the community
- Continue use of solar cooker
- Construction of toilets

#### Child welfare

- Workshop on pre-school issues
- Promotion of child rights
- Support to vulnerable groups
- Training for TMWs and child growth cards

#### Documentation (and its support)

- Collection of local data
- Periodic reports on progress
- Computer training and use

<sup>2</sup> Regarding the following list, it is interesting to note that the project team has begun to apply the term WGA—wealth generating activities – as a strategy to empower a broader community orientation.

The common plan came out of the three-week animators' workshop in Jask near the beginning of the project. Reportedly, it was principally a product of the community animators, in conjunction with CENESTA and UNICEF support. This plan was reviewed in detail during the evaluation discussion in two of the communities (see methodology section in annex for results).

While there were strengths to having a symmetrical short term plan (ease of monitoring and developing capacity building support for it, building consensus among the project communities), there were also some limitations to this approach. Among the limitations were tendencies to remove some of the analysis of baseline information and even of plan achievements from the community level in order to consolidate and compare findings.

***The animators did some tallying of data, but not the full analysis; that was done at central level of the project. (Surgalm village)***

## Long term plans

Involvement with this project has substantially raised the planning interest and capability of the participating communities. The communities are beginning to dream and open their horizons beyond the mundane.

### Some examples of long-term project ideas and plans:

Type of project	Village	Expected benefits	Other comments
Bottled water	Naw	Region, and possibly wider	There is a very large volume, year round spring with high quality water in the territory of the village
Development	Surgalm	Neighbouring villages	Hopes to work with neighbouring villages when it gets rich enough
Education	Siromj	Access to education	Want to build a school, with article 3 funds
Irrigation	Bar-Aftab	Could then do livestock project, small scale industries, workshops, animal skin treatment, weaving, canned foods Would benefit this and neighbouring villages	Based on 150 hectares of usable land Many resources available – land, electricity, people, management, animal power Need – capital (100,000,000 Tumans), technical input, basic equipment, construction materials
Reproductive health	Oraman	Pregnant women in the local area	Want to support women going to deliver a baby, possibly build a bigger health unit; will need help from outside
Transportation – road	Siromj	Access to the sea, local fishing industry	Have spoken with governor who said there is a budget for a road to the sea, but don't know when
Transportation – vehicle	Amir-Abad	Improved access to markets; Could earn equivalent of US\$ 12 per day	Minibus to/from city, with en route stops

## Economic activities

### Investment activities

#### Use of sanduq start-up funds

There were three major ways that the sanduqs chose to use the seed money. The more common strategy was communal investment in a joint venture (e.g., a retail grocery in Surgalm, a wholesale store in Gohert, a fishing boat with motor and nets in Baghan). These joint ventures often included co-funding by wealthy community members, enabling the seed money to contribute to substantially bigger projects than it might have done otherwise.

The second commonest approach was one where the communities, especially in the Yasuj area (e.g., Amir-Abad, Bar Aftab), decided to use their money to fund local micro-credit projects. And the least common approach, to date, was a local production scheme.

Co-investment/shop schemes**General or common features**

To get started, the Sanduq used the animator, themselves, and experts from the CENESTA project. They identified opportunities and feasibility, and supported the start up of the IGA project.

**Gohert village – wholesale store**

The 2.5 million tomans from UNICEF was meagre here; it does not reach far. In the end, the communities came to believe in themselves and co-investment with UNICEF. The community raised 17.5 million tomans from their own sources and combined it with the 2.5 million tomans from UNICEF. So the IGA (for wholesaling) started with about 20 million tomans. The arrangement is that 10% of the earnings on the 17.5 million tomans goes to the Sanduq, plus 100% of the earnings on the 2.5 million fund.

At the start of this particular project, the sanduq knew suppliers in Jask (the nearest trading centre) but CENESTA helped them identify suppliers in places other than Jask – such as Bandar Abbas, Tehran, and Tabriz. Next, they found they had to have a tax code to operate as a wholesale enterprise. Even without the code, with the help of one of the CENESTA staff, they were able to make purchases at one supplier to begin with. After the purchase, they worked on getting the tax code. It was a complex and difficult process. Took two months; and support from the sub-district governor was very helpful in getting the business license. The tax office was helpful and did follow-up; there was a lot of assistance to get the license.

The Sanduq is now on track. They now even have to buy in Tehran and Mashad rather than Bandar Abbass, because of the expanded scope of the project. One benefit of the wholesale shop is that four to five families now get together and buy a whole bag of sugar at lower cost, and then sub-divide it among themselves.

**Oraman community – retail store with a copy machine**

Started with nothing in the shop. The store said they had invested about 2,000,000 Tumans. A copy machine was purchased for 1,000,000 Tumans. After getting the copy machine, 1,050,000 was invested in the shop with the help of the Sanduq – 50,000 for backing immunisation; 50,000 for shop; 150,000 for buying a safe and equipment, shelves; and 800,000 was used to buy sugar, beans, rice, etc. for selling. The store/Sanduq is purchasing rice and plans to sell it later when the market prices are higher.

Photocopies are critical in the region. The sanduq went to Tehran to purchase the copy machine. In 4 months, the copying machine has been operating well; it charges less than the cost of going elsewhere to make copies, e.g., for school application forms. Copy machine may or may not be money making, but it was a real need here.

Any of the goods sold are sold for lower than the regular retail price. The store has already sold 450 containers of cooking oil at less than the prices elsewhere. They give a 100 Toman discount, and people are coming in to take advantage of it. Five kgs of cooking oil sells at 52 Tumans; it helps the community that essential goods are sold for less. Gives credit in the shop for 5-10 days if a family has no money to buy items. Whatever is bought and sold, the animator has detailed accounts – recording transactions and profit made. He has calculated the profit for each item, so he can get the gross/net profit. For the moment, he reported that there is no storage space that would allow buying local products for resale.

Community has become happy about the Sanduq, and has donated 500,000 Tumans to help with broken water pipes. In the villages, the atmosphere of the people about the project is happy. Outputs have included setting up the Sanduq; plan supporting women and children; helping with development of handicrafts; employment and IGA; meeting basic needs of people and promoting trade of villages and marketing.

**Surgalm village – retail store**

The village now has a general retail food store, selling a range of products, including dairy products that had not previously been available locally. There are also some locally produced items in the shop – roasted and salted sunflower seeds

### Micro-credit/loan schemes

The communities in the Kohgiluyeh-Boyer-Ahmad province elected to do micro-credit schemes with local decisions about what to do with profits and how to sustain the projects and income. These schemes are carried out as a collective exercise and are administered entirely by the community.

#### **General or common features**

The community funds are easy to get compared to money from government or banks, where you have to go many, many times to get any. Spouses (both men and women) sign together for the microcredit, which is an innovation in bringing the women openly into the financial arena. There is no collateral for the loans, it is a local moral issue and the whole community is the collateral. Guarantees are made by another person in the community. Reportedly, there have been no problems with this approach.

***Loans are made to men, but women have to co-sign. Loans are usually for 6 months or so, but some keep longer. Loans are charged at 4% per month. (Amir-Abad village)***

***Worked on rules of the Sanduq and decided who can draw money. Credits equivalent to US\$ 150-200 and usually for 3 months. Two-fifths of the profit goes to the Sanduq, rest to the borrower. The interest rate was set after seeing the profit possible. (Bar Aftab village)***

#### **Amir-Abad village**

Many projects have already been started, all within the past eight months. Four persons who were trading in animals have already paid back their loans. Some people now have checking accounts.

Current projects (at the time of the evaluation) for the summer ground: poultry, livestock fattening, motor pumps at water wells, beekeeping, small store. Winter ground: small shop, poultry, animal fattening, buy/sell feed, motor pump, and two who got money without specifying what they got it for.

A brief walkabout observed the following: Poultry projects (4) - some were more confined than others, all were being consumed by families, only one was really selling chickens at a substantial level (50-80 so far). One uses the chicken droppings for manure/compost. Livestock fattening: sheep project (1), bull project (1). Beekeeping project (1) - no formal training for the operator; he reported that he learned his craft by watching bees in the wild.

#### **Bar Aftab village**

There have been 19 loans so far, reaching 18 households with one a repeat borrower. Pre-harvest purchase arrangements for crops – there have been 37 HHs included in this scheme, where the crops are purchased at 14,000 Tumans rather than selling to the commercial buyers who bid 10,000 Tumans. So, 54 HHs have benefited out of the 81 HHs in the main village where the Sanduq is operating.

Seven loans have been repaid already, but some have trouble paying. The sanduq got cheques from the borrowers at the beginning, but they are not enforcing these cheques (not putting the cheque in the bank if the person does not pay). The sanduq has told people to pay on time, then if there is a problem, they can leave off paying for up to a month. There have been no loans to women, and no applications from women. They report that they “have not felt like it”. There is one possible project that has been considered by the women – applying for a loan to purchase sewing machines.

Grain buying/selling has been the most successful IGA from this village. It involves purchasing staple grains (rice, wheat) before they ripen. Says the rates of buying grains ahead are fairer than the rates that had been offered by shopkeepers. In addition, with these loans, the borrowers are allowed to repay in kind rather than cash. Some people are buying at wholesale and selling to the shops here. Others bought animal feed. Two bought a cow. Some have kept milking cows. They gave credit to one person who wanted to get married, because he made a good case for paying back and for the value to the village.

So far, the sanduq is regarding the money returned plus interest as new loan money, increasing the capital available for loans, and therefore the overall wealth of the community. There is no

information about how much profit as yet. They have not had any bookkeeping training, and are doing their own system. Meanwhile, they have had bookkeeping questions, e.g., how to deal with people who want to pay early.

### Local production schemes

#### **Naw village – shoe making**

It was reported to the reviewers that up to three-quarters of the cash-related work being conducted by people in the village is making shoes. Says the rest of the work is labouring elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> The design of the shoes is traditional to the region, so there is a local market for selling them. Heard that the quality of the shoes in this village is the best in the area. These shoes will last for up to two years, but are just good in the summer; they are not designed to tolerate wet weather.

They make all the usual sizes for persons age 12 and above. Right now, they only do one design, but would/could do others on special order. CENESTA is helping make links for the shoe makers with a company making and exporting 'health shoes' in Tehran; it has connections to a substantial international market, including a general market in Germany as well as Iranians in many other countries.

The shoes that people are making have a very firm sole, made of intensely folded blue cloth, sewn on the edge with black goat hair, and through the middle longitudinally with rawhide leather. The tip of the toe and the back of the heel of the shoe is made of very thick hard leather with many small nails in it. The top of the shoe is made of string that is tightly tied/knitted.

The soles take 1/3 of a day to produce one pair (three pairs in a day), with only 2-3 men in the village who know how to do it. The tops are produced by 8 or more families and take about three days per pair. The Sanduq buys shoes that are incomplete and gives them to needy community members to finish, as an IGA.<sup>4</sup> Persons without money (needy) get materials for shoe making through the animator. The Sanduq has already generated 300,000 Tumans in interest.

#### **Kikan village – communal irrigation**

The community has access to a tube well; and the irrigated agriculture is producing vegetables and tomatoes that are being sold for income. Fifteen households are currently participating, and others now want to join. They have established a Sanduq committee, linked to getting this IGA and job opportunity. The project team have highlighted Kikan village as a good example of intersectoral cooperation – the agriculture sector helped to design the irrigation systems. It also acted as an intermediary to transfer the pump to the community because at the time the sanduq was not yet set-up. The energy sector brought electric lines and gave them credit to do the wiring, and the local government monitored the process.

## ***Transfer of ideas***

### **Spread of innovations**

According to the information availed to the review, this project is unique, at least in the regions where it has been established, and probably in the whole country.

***No other similar projects anywhere else in the province.*** (Bandar-Abbass PMD)

As such, the spread of ideas from this project may be an important indicator of impact, as well as showing receptiveness to its expansion or replication in other areas.

### Neighbouring communities

There were several examples of how project innovations are beginning to spread to neighbouring communities. In Yasuj district (an area practicing seasonal migration), people were noticing the spread of ideas particularly from the wintering communities. For example, people from nearby villages are now requesting books for their communities.

<sup>3</sup> The project team reports that there is a thriving orchard sector in this area and people here also harvest forest products.

<sup>4</sup> The project team point to this as an example of a "true" IGA where an individual benefits versus a WGA (where the community benefits).

***This project is a good model for other villages. Some neighbouring villages are asking if they can get loans from this village. (Bar Aftab village animator)***

The Yasuj co-ordinator pointed out that it is very possible to influence nearby villages, especially as they see the village's needs being satisfied. But if they do not see any change, then they won't be interested. Where their needs are being met, it can be a powerful entry point for sharing ideas and stimulating participation.

***People from up to 12 kms away come to the grocery store in this village set up by the Sanduq. There are about 50 HHs in the surrounding area that depend on this store. (Surgalm village animator)***

### Information sharing

All the villages indicated willingness to share their experiences with other groups that are interested in the project, including other villages that want to try a similar approach.

Even some of the technical people associated with the project are beginning to transfer the lessons learnt to other arenas. A doctor in the Yasuj health office was able to use examples from this project to have a positive influence on a discussion about activating the health network. On another occasion, when he was involved with a discussion of total quality (quality assurance), he was also able to refer to this project about community involvement in improving quality of services.

### **Computer**

Computers and printers were available to the co-ordinating Sanduqs in each of the three programme provinces. The co-ordinators were expected to use the computers to prepare written reports on their activities and achievements. Many communities were using their computers to generate reports for the sanduq. In fact, many animators, including the executive directors of the sanduqs were making use of the computers.

In addition, some training has been provided to interested persons. This training was not highly structured, i.e., there was no particular curriculum, but it generally stimulated a lot of interest.

***There has been computer training – started for girls, and then boys also got interested. Happens one to two times per week. (Amir-Abad village)***

In Amir Abad, the community was organizing computer classes for girls only. They were giving a preference to girls because they felt that boys could go to Yasuj for the training but girls could not travel that far so they need to have classes locally.

Meanwhile, there were also some constraints in moving into the information age for the villages. For example, achieving consensus about the value of the new technology.

***Not sure of the purpose of the computer. (Oraman village, VC leader)***

Because the equipment is expensive, but also exciting to have and use, there are difficulties in reaching and stabilising an equitable arrangement for shared use of the single items.

***The computer belongs to four villages and there is some dispute about how to share the use. I have sent my son to Tehran to learn computer, but we are not yet sure where to put it. (Oraman village animator)***

### **Documentation**

#### Strengths

The project villages are maintaining their own archives of correspondence, handouts, data collection and PRA maps and tools that have been created locally. The implementing NGO, CENESTA, has also made a significant effort to collect all of the key documents. CENESTA has then archived copies, as well as presenting copies to important stakeholders, like the provincial government authorities. Animators have become accustomed to preparing activity reports, and are increasingly using the project computers to write these reports. In Oraman village, for example, the animator not only has activity reports, but also has written meeting reports for the sanduq, and all the participants sign them (for transparency).

### Weaknesses

It appeared in the field that some of the work of collecting community documents and organising files was just being done recently rather than having been done all along as a routine practice. In addition, it seemed that originals of maps and some other documents had been 'borrowed' from communities and then not returned for long periods of time. For example, in Surgalm village, the animator had some maps, but not the best ones. The best ones had been sent to CENESTA for copying and then compiling into a report on the project for all stakeholders.

## **Education and child development**

### Library/books

A donation of books was made by UNICEF to each programme community – 300 books, mostly targeted toward children. In Yasuj, the university collaborated and gave bookshelves to the communities. None of the villages had a community library before this donation. All of the project communities had received the donation of books from UNICEF, and some of the communities were particularly adamant about the positive value of the books for their community.

***The library helps the community. In fact, the books are more important than the money the community has obtained.*** (Amir-Abad village mixed focus group)

Much as the books were appreciated, and communities were requesting more, it was unusual to find a community that had managed to supplement the original donation. This may be a reflection of a combination of factors – libraries as a exceedingly new innovation in communities, very rural communities with little or no access to book outlets, and even a lack of awareness among the various government sectors about the existence of the libraries and their potential to use them for circulating documents and facilitating their own sectoral education efforts.

***The books are being read by the youth and children. There is a strong adult literacy organisation here, and they also use the books. There have been some additions to the books – some from Ministry of Jihad that even gave cloth books for young children.*** (Bar Aftab village female animator)

One constraint that has limited the use of the books is the cultural difficulty in establishing gender equity and good access to the books for girls and women.

***We have set up a house for development, i.e., a room, with a library where books are checked out or read from there. We had a competition for the children on reading books, but it was mostly boys who participated. Strong cultural rules about men mean that we can't work too fast with the girls.*** (Gohert village animator)

Examining the contents of the libraries, it was found that the books are principally oriented to children and youth, and cover many topics, e.g., fiction and science. However, there are no books teaching about development, e.g., there are no books on poultry rearing, irrigation, or improving agriculture. These kinds of books would be widely appreciated not only by the youth but also by the adults in the community that are trying to improve their conditions.

During the course of the evaluation, one respondent from the health sector in Yasuj raised a concern about the Ministry of Education potentially misinterpreting the intention of the project in distributing books. He was, however, reassured by UNICEF and CENESTA that the Ministry of Education and Local Government had both been active partners in the selection of the books that were donated.

### Child development

A collective exercise was conducted during implementation, wherein four people (two male and two female) were invited from each of the programme villages to a workshop on child welfare and development. By report of the animators, some villages were able to recruit the full complement or even more (e.g., Baghan reportedly sent 3-4 girls and 2-3 men), and others were unable to mobilise the full numbers, especially of women (e.g., Siromj).

Following this workshop, the participants returned to their villages and tried to mobilise their communities to implement the ideas of the workshop, such as day care programmes, increased emphasis on child and women's rights, better nutrition for children, and more support to play and intellectual development for children. Some communities really took the child development workshop to heart and acted upon the ideas when they got home.

**Amir-Abad village**

After the workshop, the men who attended the meeting have taken some of the children camping, set up a football pitch, plans for a playground, purchase of some games and group toys. They have learned the value of the colostrum that they used to discard. One man described going to the workshop and coming back to do a lot with "an empty hand" by explaining child values to women, and trying to co-ordinate child care and development activities in the village.

**Bar Aftab village**

When the participants from the workshop returned, they set up a day care centre for play, child care and training. They sat together to rent a house for the school, separate from the primary school. At the day care/pre-school, they have had three weeks of day care so far, and all the young kids go there, learning skills and good behaviour. However, when school starts, they won't have space and they are not sure what to do. They got this space on request from the education department. At least 24 children go for this, aged 4 years and upwards. They do stories, and organised play. It lasts for 2-4 hours each day, with no meal available. The teacher, who is also the female animator, quits early if the children are too tired.

**Naw village**

Men and women are learning about the value of recreation for children. They have some toys direct from UNICEF and some kits provided by CENESTA. They have also used some Sanduq money for soccer, jump ropes, and badminton equipment.

Education and gender (schooling for girls)

Access to education for girls has been limited in many areas, both in terms of family permission (or encouragement) to attend, and in terms of schools that are set up to teach to girls. According to the project team, there are significant differences between communities that are West and East of Jask. Communities to the west of Jask are more open, and their need is greatest for a boarding high school for girls. To the east of Jask, it is hard to find girls in these communities (which include Surgalm, Gohert and Lirdaf) that have gone beyond primary school; therefore, the need for east of Jask is for a boarding junior high school for girls. The project has worked intensively with the education sector in Jask, Bandar Abbas and even in Tehran and was instrumental in finally getting a boarding junior high school in Lirdaf in September of 1999. Some of the villages were using the project community assessments as a jumping off point for advocacy and action on this issue.

**Surgalm village**

One consequence of the project has been efforts to promote women, e.g., through establishing boarding schools. Last year there were 40 girls/women in the adult literacy class and the woman teacher had a house; but this year there is no class.

**Gohert village**

When the project started, there was no possibility for girls' education, so they have started to follow-up on the issue. Wrote letters to the governor general, where they got a letter to the district governor that a school for girls at the junior high level is welcome. CENESTA has been following the issue up, and the community is also hoping that UNICEF can follow up on this issue.

The project has also facilitated access to secondary education for a number of girls, mostly from the western side of Jask district. In Jask, the local government office and CENESTA were able to convince the education sector to accept secondary level girls into the boarding school. This, however, was not a component of the UNICEF project and UNICEF did not pay for this. As the parents had no money, the project team had to locate an independent funding source that would support the girls for one year. After that period, the Government secured funds in order to continue the boarding of secondary girls in subsequent years.

Child rights/child welfare

Child rights issues were included in the initial three-week training workshop at Jask for community animators. The following example is perhaps one of the stronger examples from the whole project, illustrating the potential for change when there is active follow-up in the community.

**Bar Aftab village**

After returning from the training workshop, the animators talked about child rights and how to treat children. They had a lot of meetings about the rights of children and now people are culturally more aware about the issues. There is more attention to child rights and better communication with their children. Children are now being allowed to participate in events. One member of the village sanduq committee went to one school where a child was arguing with the teacher saying that he had rights. They put the articles of the convention on child rights in the schools so that the children could see them. Also asked religious leaders to come and see the rights.

In another example, the data gathering exercise and associated discussion provoked the community to take ownership of a child welfare problem that had previously been ignored.

**Surgalm village**

The data gathering and discussion process identified vulnerable children, including two children who had been abandoned by their parents. The community found homes for these two children and set up a community charity for them.

This richness of outcomes on child rights was not uniform, however. In one village, it was reported that the extent of child rights involvement was giving children religious instruction for moral education.

Women - rights and activism

There were both good and feeble examples of community response to the issue of women's rights that was also promoted in the initial Jask workshop.

**Bar Aftab village – good example**

Women believe that people's attitudes have changed. Men are now pouring tea, which they did not use to do. Women get more respect, and interactions and understanding have improved. Men take better care of their wives, e.g., not making the women go to the mountain to get wood; they don't force them to do so anymore.

**Gohert village – weak example**

At first there were women members in the sanduq committee, but they gave up. The women said they did not understand about such things and would not be able to do anything, and they trusted the men. There was a lady animator, but she has not been active and has basically quit, along with the female members of the Sanduq – though none of them has done a formal resignation, and could be considered as 'inactive'.

**Environment**

While this project is still relatively young, the broad environmental background of CENESTA as the implementing agency has helped stimulate community awareness and support community involvement in environmental issues.

There were two main environmental activities that have been adopted or promoted in many of the communities. These were first, the improvement of human waste disposal – recognition that toilets were often insufficient and more homes needed to construct or improve their toilets. This was addressed principally through health education, though some sanduqs also used community funds to address the problem.

The second major environmental activity was the donation of solar cookers to the sanduqs, together with some training in their use. This was done as a pilot project, with an effort to engage communities in testing the cookers and making specific suggestions for improvements relative to their local practices and conditions.

Although it was not part of the project proposal, some communities were also getting increasingly involved with tree planting, e.g., Surgalm, Amir-Abad, as well as planning and advocacy around access to land and natural resources, and improved agricultural and resource harvesting methods.

Appropriate technology

The solar cooker effort was very successful in some areas and less so in others. A key factor affecting the difference was the amount of time and attention spent on preparing the community for the project. Following are two examples, one successful, and one notably less successful.

**Bar Aftab village**

The village received five solar cookers. The animator and sanduq rotated them in the community, and helped the users to record impressions and observations in order to learn. In this way, they collected concrete information about how long it takes for different kinds of foods to cook in this location. Everybody likes it – it takes less fuel, saves time (if you plan ahead), and costs less.

**Amir-Abad village**

The solar cookers worked at the winter village, but flopped at the summering area – two glass covers broke and they were unable to cook food quickly at the time of day they wanted the food.

Tree planting

The following examples illustrate two approaches to the tree planting – collective and individual. One can note that these variations mirror the microcredit (individual) and community investment (collective) approaches of the regions where these villages are located.

**Surgalm village**

The community received some assistance from the relevant sector, and did an extensive project planting 'Harrah" tree (mangroves) in some tidal areas near the sea. They understood how this would have a positive effect on the shrimp fishing that is one of their economic mainstays. Before the project, this community was not taking care of the mangroves; there was open grazing for camels and the mangroves were being degraded. The project worked with the community, so they initiated a conservation plan of their own and began restricting camel access.

According to project team members, Surgalm and the Forest and Range Organization had a dispute because the FRO had planted some mesquite (non-indigenous) without consulting the community. The project facilitated the commencement of dialogue between the community and the FRO both locally and centrally. The community managed to convince the FRO central not to plant anymore mesquite and not to plant any vegetation without consulting the community about indigenous species. This subsequently became an FRO regulation.

In addition to the mangrove and mesquite issues, this same community is the one where efforts to establish domestic gardens have met with the most success, i.e., it has become a more environmentally sensitised and conscious community.

**Amir-Abad village**

One person is creating some green space and is planting some acacias and lemons. Although it is only one person so far, the community is aware of his effort is monitoring the results

Access to land and natural resources

The project team reports that some of sanduqs, notably Oraman sanduq, are doing sustainable harvesting of Saqez (natural chewing gum). They got permits from the FRO to harvest Saqez. This is significant because it is a community based sustainable use of natural resources.

The government has a national plan to turn over public lands for private use. Local communities, FRO and CENESTA have been negotiating to have FRO controlled land turned over to communities for protected community managed lands and in some cases for agro-forestry projects. Project members reported that the FRO had identified a number of areas that could be turned over to local communities. It was also reported that in the Jask region, for the first time in Iran, two community administered forest reserves were being created.

The project team reports that there is a large dam project going on in Jask (Surgalm and Siromj). The team has been working with these communities to raise their awareness concerning the impact of the dam on their communities and their ancestral natural resources. As a result of CENESTA efforts, communities have started getting involved with the project and begun voicing concerns to relevant line ministries.

Some of the sanduqs have been stimulated to do research on potentials for eco-tourism, including an idea for marine based eco-tourism in the Jask region.

#### Improved agricultural and resource harvesting methods

Project team members have been working with communities to introduce organic agriculture, which seems to have a good potential for local acceptance, since these communities don't have a big history of pesticide use. In fact, some communities are already marketing organically grown vegetables. Regular discussions have also been held with communities in all three regions about IPM (integrated pest management). This has been done by sharing lessons from FAO's community-based IPM project, which is being implemented by CENESTA. There has been a lot of interest in the Neem tree as a natural pesticide, and the project has been transferring information concerning this tree from India and Africa to the participating communities through printed material and videos.

In the villages of Lenjabad and Kikan in Kurdistan province, CENESTA has facilitated training for the animators and others at the ministry of agriculture on non-chemical farming of exotic fruits and vegetables. In addition, some people from these same villages have gone through rangeland management training at Jihad.

The Jask region is a big shrimping region, with increasing numbers of fishermen and competition as more enterprise develops. CENESTA reports that it has had discussions with communities in the Jask area about what other countries are doing for ecologically sound shrimping. They have also been talking to fishermen in the Jask region concerning their nets and fishing practices, as well as having talks with Fisheries about holding cooperative workshops.

## Lessons learnt – about the current project

This section sets out descriptive lessons learnt about the project by the project participants and stakeholders. It is descriptive in the sense of talking about lessons from the project as it has been implemented; the next section on expresses opinions about ways forward for the future. The main sub-headings in this section are:

- Strengths of the ABP
- Weaknesses of the ABP

### **Strengths of the ABP**

#### **Generating self-confidence**

The project has been bringing about an increase in self-confidence, belief in oneself, belief in one's capacity, among rural people in villages and communities selected in the project. People have hope for the future.

#### **Increasing participatory activity and opportunity**

Participation can be viewed in many different ways. Looking first from the perspective of the community, it is possible to identify increased community participation in mobilisation, involvement in discussions, and establishing local social development structures.

Mobilisation can be seen in the stimulation/activation of community residents, creating incentives and enthusiasm for participation. It is also evident in the progressively greater engagement of women in project activities, though this aspect has been a bit slower since the project found it essential for cultural acceptability to start with the men.

***Traditionally, women were only in house. Now they are coming out and discussing their problems.*** (Women's commission representative, Marivan meeting)

Involvement in discussions is seen in the greater involvement of community members in meetings about their problems and possible solutions, compared to the past (e.g., Surgalm village). Discussions are taking place in a spirit of community collaboration and increasing participation of the

whole community, including women and children. Communities have also been encouraged (and acting on the encouragement) to make direct contact with government sectors for solving their problems (e.g., reported in Yasuj provincial meeting).

The local social development structure that has been developed in the project communities is the sanduq. In short form, the steps in developing a sanduq have included identifying economic needs as one of the primary concerns of the community, establishing an organisation among households in a village; and then establishment of sustainable development funds (Sanduqs) and their by-laws.

### **Establishing community ownership of development**

Another element of participation is the ownership of the development process. In this regard, ownership can be disaggregated into levels of assessment, planning and implementation. The process is revealing the development capacity of local communities: local analysis, developing their own project proposals, decision-making and local implementation.

#### Assessment

There is ample evidence of improved abilities of people in the project communities to identify their problems/needs and to prioritise them. People's awareness has been raised about their own problems. Economic improvement, health and well-being and education have generally ranked among the highest priorities.

***Did not believe before this project that village people have the capacity to plan and decide. Now know that even people in low literate situations are better at identifying their needs than experts.*** (Yasuj PHO)

#### Planning: Proposing solutions and decision-making

This project has promoted decentralised planning by increasing planning skills and capacity among the people. Having identified their own problems, people are prioritising and reaching consensus about their needs. From there, they are now seeking solutions and proposing actions on those problems based on their own ideas and experiences.

***We learned how to participate and work together to make decisions.*** (Baghan village, men)

Several respondents noted that the communities are now making more effective use of their existing resources, including human and natural resources, at the village level.

***This project has good leverage for providing services to women because the decision-makers are the women and villagers. The design has come from the village and gives value to the people. Ladies have changed the opinion of the Friday prayer leader and women have come together with men to discuss problems.*** (Women's commission representative, Marivan meeting)

Stakeholders have also been impressed by the community ownership.

***There has been good prioritisation by communities, together with economic feasibility planning.*** (UNICEF, Marivan meeting)

#### Action: local implementation

Communities are quite visibly active in participatory management of the project, e.g., operating shops, raising animals, and doing agriculture. These individual and community projects are also identified only by community name, rather than having large signboards that show ownership by some external agency. In addition, the communities are endorsing the sanduq arrangements in writing.

***We are not yet sure if the Sanduq arrangement is fully legal or not, but the community decided and the village council has signed the agreement. It is showing the potential for the community to run it for themselves.*** (UNICEF, Marivan meeting)

Several respondents (e.g., a provincial health centre staff member at the Marivan meeting) indicated that the active role of the animators in mobilising the communities and implementing activities is a reason for success.

## Partnership – community, stakeholders

A third key element in the participatory nature (and achievements) of this project is the development of collaboration and partnerships. There are many examples of increased alliances among and between local communities and involved groups.

Communities have appreciated the respect among the stakeholders in the project, and their attitude of collaboration and cooperation. For their part, the stakeholders seem to have respected traditional culture and traditions in each of the project areas, and even emphasised the restitution of such values.

Government attitudes, broadly taken, seem to have been positive, i.e., sectors supporting community participation, developing closer collaboration with the health sector at provincial and district levels, and building motivation among enthusiastic government sector people to support the project. Government had a relatively minor role at the beginning of the project, and this has helped its technical experts not to take over from the community while the communities were finding and developing their own strengths. Although there were comments about weaknesses in the collaboration among sectors and between sectors and communities, people agreed that some changes were beginning.

***This meeting is showing that intersectoral collaboration is happening, and how various issues can be addressed.*** (PHO, Yasuj meeting)

A meeting in the District Governor's office in one province identified some of the key factors contributing to good co-ordination by government.

***This province has had good co-ordination of sectors and the reason has been respect of government and people toward each other. District government and MoH support at district and provincial level are good. The Commission for Women officer at the provincial level has also been active and helpful.*** (CENESTA, Marivan meeting)

The donor agency, UNICEF, was praised by communities and the other stakeholders for its patience and support to the process, despite various difficulties and the slowness of participatory development. While UNICEF acknowledged that it had only put a relatively small amount of money into this modest pilot project, it was a seed that was watered and nurtured to active life and even considerable growth in most of the project communities.

***UNICEF did not owe us anything, and the money they advanced was only the wheel of one tractor, but it was something.*** (Amir-Abad village)

The implementing NGO, CENESTA, was praised for its good, supportive attitude, despite various difficulties and setbacks. They were also praised by communities and other stakeholders for using practical and applied methods instead of general ideas; creating a background for generating attention to a model of participatory and sustainable development.

## Capacity building

Capacity building has been a critical factor linked to community participation. Capacity improvement can be perceived as a contributing factor, e.g., in the capacity building of many people in order to allow or support implementation of the specific plans of the project. Changed attitudes and practices can also be perceived as an outcome of the project, e.g., the way that many communities are now developing proposals and starting activities that are well beyond the small resource inputs of the area-based project. The capacity building that has taken place has affected awareness (through sensitisation and mobilisation), knowledge and skills (through training and practice), and behaviour (through access to resources, about which see more below).

***Looking at all sectors, community was the weakest so we decided to start there. Tried to develop community as the boss; to determine their own abilities and quality.*** (CENESTA, Yasuj meeting)

### Awareness raised

Communities have been sensitised about many topics, including health, children's rights, the role of women, local and traditional knowledge and management of projects and money. Residents have been mobilised to improve their sanitation, e.g., by building latrines, establishing home gardens that use wastewater, and keeping animal wastes away from the houses.

Specific knowledge and skills

IGAs and economic development – there was widespread enthusiasm about the entry of new ideas and methods of livelihood into the villages, e.g., bee-keeping, poultry breeding, irrigated agriculture, and professional shoe-making. As pointed out in Amir-Abad village, before the project, no one was even considering poultry raising as an economic enterprise.

***The centre of development is a job. In this, the ABP participation (including women) is very important. In the village, women are the economists, but due to illiteracy, they can't express themselves, but they can work together with participatory leverage to have IGAs. Point is that we have to let people make their own decisions. Thanks to UNICEF/CENESTA for providing this opportunity to community people. (Min of Labour and Social Affairs representative, Marivan meeting)***

Solar cookers - Many community residents have appreciated the opportunity to learn about solar cookery, and they liked it as an activity that appealed to women, e.g., Baghan. It has also been an activity that has been most successful where it has been a learning process for the community, i.e., gathering and discussing local experiences with the cookers.

Home gardens – although this was not a universal practice in the project communities, some had taken it up with considerable interest, e.g., Surgalm.

Focus on children and women

One of the particular focal areas for capacity building in this project has been improving the well-being of vulnerable groups, especially women and children. To this end, there have been many examples given by the communities of the project.

- Attention to health and family planning for children and women (Baghan village, men)
- Improving early child care (after the workshop) (Baghan village, women)
- Fulfilling children and women's rights. (Yasuj provincial meeting)
- Helping women and children in higher risk categories (Surgalm village)
- Women taking better care of children for hygiene (Baghan village, women)
- Helping children's nutrition status (Surgalm village)

There are many examples of strengthening for women and how the communities are moving, albeit slowly, toward greater gender equity. The following quote is a particularly cogent one in this regard.

***Has been very significant to have a female animator from here (named Malik). Before the Jask workshop, she had never spoken in front of men. She also saw the ocean for the first time during that workshop, despite growing up in a fishing village (about 15 minutes drive from the ocean). (Surgalm village)***

**Improved access to key resources (for capacity building, other)**

As with capacity building, the improvement of access to key resources is both a contributing factor to the project achievements, and is itself an achievement of the project. The net effect of the improved access is to act as an incentive for involvement and thereby reinforce community participation.

Community development fund

The community development funds established by the Sanduqs were designed to accumulate wealth on behalf of communities.

***The issue is funding support; with this concern, the Sanduq idea was invented – investing returns and using some of the returns to meet needs of the community. The Sanduq is a good approach; it helps planning for development. Depending on money in the Sanduq, it can start other projects and respond to other development needs. (Health sector, Marivan meeting)***

Virtually all of the community economic activities initiated only a matter of months before the evaluation were already generating income. In addition, in some of the communities had already starting using some of these funds for community development, e.g., improvement of drinking water quality and recreation for children (Naw village). Some also used the funds to specifically assist

needy families, e.g., helping low-income households to buy the sole of the shoes that they use in making shoes (Naw village).

#### Establishing learning resources

Many communities have taken the donated books and created small community libraries. These libraries may be small in scale at 250-300 books, but they very much appreciated where none had been present at all before. Children, adolescents and youth are the main library users.

***The library encourages youth and students to study books and spend their spare time well.***  
(Naw village, men)

#### Nutrition (varied diet)

Several communities have established grocery stores, which is expanding the variety of foods available, and thereby affecting local nutrition (usually positively, though one can also note the sale of more candy and 'junk food' – i.e., highly processed foods that are quite expensive relative to nutritional value, caloric or otherwise). The local presence of the store is also perceived as a relief to both men and women related to their gender roles.

***Women are now participating in purchasing household foodstuffs (since they can do it locally whereas before the men had to be the ones to do it in town).*** (Surgalm village)

#### Establishing communication resources

Several villages have brought communication resources nearer, improving access to the outside world (e.g., to markets, civil authorities, and the support of the implementing NGO). These have included telephones, copy machines and computers (with printers).

***Thanks to UNICEF and CENESTA for a great project. Just regarding the copy machine, e.g., it is responding to a community need.*** (Provincial health centre staff member, Marivan meeting)

## **Weaknesses of ABP**

### **Project design and start-up**

Slow start-up – the initial stage of the project leading up to starting implementation of activities in the communities was too long for some respondents (e.g., health sector, UNICEF comments at Yasuj meeting). Some respondents felt that this was appropriately done at the pace of communities; others objected and felt that it should have been possible to get started sooner. Some respondents believed that the slowness was an inherent issue in the design of the project; while others believed that external factors, such as bureaucracy and staff transfers in government had interfered with project progress.

Dispersed and remote communities – the selection of provinces, districts and communities was based on criteria related to need and demonstrating community participation capacity in a variety of vulnerable communities. This process resulted in a very dispersed set of communities, some of which are quite remote from provincial and district headquarters towns. Some respondents appreciated this strategy for testing the project in vulnerable communities, but others objected that the villages were spread too far apart. Time and distance acted as a barrier to the provision of monitoring and follow-up support. In addition, some areas either had no road directly to the community (e.g., Naw summering area) or were cut off at some seasons (e.g., Oraman).

Small scale of the project – this was a pilot project, with modest inputs (both overall and to the 15 project communities). Some respondents objected to the microcredit projects, saying that they were too small to make much difference. Some objected to the small number of villages, saying that the success was too dependent on a small number of personalities (e.g., the animators and co-ordinators), and did not develop (or test) system capacity. Some felt that the project was just too small to solve the fundamental problems of poverty (e.g., sub-district representative, Marivan meeting). There was also strong concern that short-term projects are less effective (e.g., CENESTA, Yasuj meeting).

Economic focus – although all communities had a very high priority for income and wealth improvement in their own prioritisation of problems, some respondents in the evaluation objected that too much importance was given to income generation activities in the implementation of the project.

Insufficient participation opportunities – some respondents felt that there was not enough attention to the selection and training of animators. Some felt that the community missed out when the orientation workshop was only held in Jask and only for the animators instead of being conducted in each of the project villages for a wider representation of the community. Realistically, of course, such a massive training effort was infeasible within the resources of this project and it was more realistic to use the training of trainers approach.

There was also a suggestion that there had been gaps in the provision of continuous education for the purpose of improving and strengthening the spirit of participation (e.g., in the Yasuj meeting). Others have pointed out the frequent change of personnel in government sectors, including health, e.g., when a focal point from Yasuj trained in Jask did not return to continue to link and serve. The heads of the MoH in the province had also changed twice. As the project team have pointed out, however, one of the overall intentions was to reduce dependence on government offices and officials anyway.

### **Sectoral/intersectoral collaboration**

Low involvement by sectors – some respondents (e.g., in the Yasuj meeting) felt that there had been little success in developing intersectoral participation, involvement, collaboration, co-ordination, and financial support (from sectors involved with development), especially during implementation. Some said there is lack of adequate awareness of the political and executive authorities about the project. In part, this was blamed on low political will at local levels, and partly on the rapid turnover of key government officials. The result was said to be lack of attention by government sectors to the project in the absence of UNICEF and the implementing agency.

***Turnover of governor general is a problem; it has happened three times in course of the project here. Participation and collaboration need to be internalised, systematised; but it is a problem if the officials change – unless the people are involved, which is what is being done. (Yasuj meeting)***

Lack of integration of sectors into the project - There was also some concern by sectors that they had not been considered at the very beginning of the project, and therefore had not been invited (or enabled) to create a framework for people's participation. The following quote highlights that the orientation of this project was based more at community level than it was at level of expectations by the sectors.

***Intersectoral collaboration was not objective of the ABP project or of the stakeholders, or the project would not have achieved what has been done. We decided to start from bottom and see what could happen. (CENESTA, Yasuj meeting)***

There was an associated complaint that there had been little information sharing by the project with the sectors at district/provincial level. Looking from the other side, there also seem to be weaknesses in government's willingness to partner with NGOs.

***Given the bureaucratic aspects of government, there is resistance to NGOs really taking root. The Ministry of Jihad has own rules/regulations; so does the Ministry of Agriculture. There will always be resistance by government sectors to working outside their own bureaucracies. (Yasuj meeting)***

On the one hand, some government sectors are concerned about the capacity of the community to participate, i.e., to make contributions.

***Our department has some similar income generation projects with the community but financial co-operation of the community is weak. People did not welcome this kind of project; people do not co-operate in paying for things. (Co-operative department, Marivan meeting)***

On the other hand, some community members are concerned about the government's capacity to participate, i.e., to listen.

***We have had differences of opinion of community with the Ministry of Agriculture about placement of irrigation project and water point. Ministry wants to put it some place that the community knows and has told them will cause problems, but the min says that because they are paying the bill, they can decide.*** (Bar Aftab, animator).

Weak health sector response – some respondents observed that there had been a lack of efforts by the health sector in using the project's experiences and planning to conduct similar projects (e.g., community and health sector respondents, Yasuj meeting). It was suggested that this due to low participation by the health sector at all levels, including inadequate involvement of the health sector at the central level, as well as at the periphery.

***The level of awareness at district level is poor about this project. We could have supported the behvarz to be more involved.*** (District doctor, Dehdasht district, Bar Aftab village)

## Support and follow-up

Guidance – there were objections by some respondents to the choices made by the project communities, e.g., locating a store in Oraman where there are already other stores instead of putting in a more remote village, and developing a shoe-making IGA without providing training to the community (Min of Jihad representative, Marivan meeting). Project staff, on the other hand, say that the participants in the shoe-making venture were unemployed members of the community who were taken on as apprentices by master cobblers. As such they received on the job training. This disparity of perceptions suggests that more information sharing about the project at district and provincial level is probably needed.

Interestingly, there were similar complaints voiced by community respondents about sectoral projects, e.g., a large loan from the Ministry of Jihad and the Agricultural bank where the person who took it got into all kinds of trouble (Bar Aftab). The community reported that they were not aware of the project, or they could have advised against the location due to stony ground and other difficulties that have stalled the project.

NGO and donor support – there were some complaints (e.g., at the Yasuj meeting) that the implementing agency (CENESTA) had limited technical expertise (compared to the sectoral experts). Some respondents felt that the NGO had an unorganised approach in the implementation of the project, perhaps due in part to rapid turnover in the agency and lack of clarity about the actual project director. Another explanation offered by the project team is that CENESTA strove to stimulate community decision-making, and therefore did not lay out a refined programme of work, preferring to move at the pace of the community – which is not the usual practice of the sectors or UNICEF.

While the community book donations were generally highly praised, they were not without difficulties. During visits to the community libraries, it was found that there were no books in the libraries on development activities, e.g., raising poultry, options for income generation projects, managing small enterprises, or accounting for beginners. This may be partially a reflection of the agencies involved in the original choice of books – UNICEF and the Ministry of Education. But it also reflects on some gaps in the attention and awareness of the value of this resource to the community by the implementing team and the government sectors.

There have also been conflicts in some communities about placement of the books and control of access to their use. In one community (Amir-Abad) this had been linked to an error by a former project staff member who had given some volunteers money inappropriately and created strife.

In some communities, the solar cookers had also been problematic. One of the problems was sorting out difficulties in rotating the cookers among the community since only a few were donated to each community as a pilot effort. Another was breakage and inadequate use of the cookers, which was attributed by the implementing NGO to a combination of poor initial design drawn from international resource documents, as well as insufficient training and preparation by the project for the local community. In this case, however, the project team reports that they have subsequently been quite successful at learning from the community experience – going on to develop cookers that are a better design for the rural lifestyle and even creating cookbooks based on lessons learnt.

Monitoring and information gathering – some respondents were concerned that there was no formal baseline household survey in each village at the beginning of the project, with local objectives linked to the baseline findings. While this concern discounts the value of the qualitative, self-generated ‘baseline’ prepared by the animators and communities themselves, it does highlight a concern among some of the ministry decision-makers about having some consistent indicators against which comparisons can be made later for tracking achievements.

On a related note, there was some concern expressed to the review team about the sufficiency of knowledge in the project group regarding people’s culture and traditions. Rather than a question of cultural sensitivity in the field, this may actually have been another manifestation of insufficient communication about the project to the sectoral staff. The review team met most of the experienced experts on cultural and anthropological fields who had been with the project teams from the earliest times when they were initiating their work the communities (e.g., Mr. Garroussy), plus permanent local advisors from each region (e.g., Mr. Yaqoub Ghaffari in Kohgiluyeh, Pakhireh, Singaleh and Khatibi-Zadeh in Jask, and Parikhani as well as others in Kurdistan).

Some respondents felt that there had been inadequate monitoring during the implementation of the project. In part, this was ascribed to the limited number of visits made to the villages during the project lifespan, which was in turn blamed on both distance and access to funds for travel. In part, it might also be pointed out that there was relatively little participatory monitoring by the communities, which is perhaps not surprising in such a young project. Community maps and plans were not readily at hand in all the communities, and often did not show issues that were considered important to the community workplan, e.g., specific numbers of houses and people, presence and location of latrines, and risk areas in the community (e.g., Surgalm and Siromj).

### **Sustainability**

Continuity – there is some uncertainty with regard to continuation and support of the project, especially with regard to the donor (UNICEF). It is unclear to the communities and other interested parties what the next steps are likely to be for the communities that are already in the project. Possibly due to turnover of personnel in government and supporting agencies, there was some lack of awareness of some people, especially in government, about the objectives of the project.

Management capacity – accountability for the turnover of funds has been relatively weak in some of the communities. There was concern about the capacity of the communities to calculate income and follow through on commitments to use 20% of the income for community development projects. Already one community has dropped out due to lack of organisational and management capacity, and reportedly, another one is about to do so. The project team very appropriately points out, however, that the statutes of the sanduqs specify that the 20% is to be calculated at the end of the financial year, but by the time of the review, a full financial year had not yet taken place in any of the communities visited. Pushing for a more rapid off-take of funds during the first months of operation of the fledgling businesses is more likely to be detrimental than beneficial, though periodic reminders and discussion with the community about plans for the eventual application of the funds could be useful and reinforcing.

Access to markets – in the face of increasing local capacity for production (e.g., shoes, vegetables, animals), there is a shortage of linkages to markets outside of the immediate vicinity of the project communities, which is a constraint to their income generating potential. As a related issue, some (or most) of the income generating activities that have been initiated so far are seasonal, and there is concern about the capacity of communities and households to generate and manage their income appropriately to cover the whole year.

### **Cultural values**

Gender equity – it has proven quite difficult to develop very equal participation levels for women versus men. The strategies developed by the project are not uniformly successful, and in some areas, values about gender are so deeply entrenched that it appears solvable only in the very long term.

***This village is behind others. Partly because women unwilling to move from here, so problem with mobilising animators. (Siromj village, men)***

Roles and expectations about labour – cultural values are also quite strong in the realm of occupational roles and health behaviours. Practices associated with centuries old patterns, e.g., of nomadic pastoralism, may be less suited to the contemporary environment of sedentary agriculture or fishing. These values are sometimes creating difficulty in taking up local responsibility and using local resources for the management of rubbish and human waste that accumulate when one stays in one area for a long time.

### **Funding levels**

Funding – while all communities appreciated the funds that had been given, some hoped for more, feeling that the amount received was very insufficient relative to their levels of need. Some respondents felt that government was weak in declaring the support that it did have available, or facilitating the process of accessing that support, e.g., loans and grants under article 3. There were also concerns with some projects that the investment would not be sufficient to bring the project up to the level of sustainability, e.g., the shoemaking project.

***Since the materials for making shoes are expensive, the provided fund is just [not] enough for [the] shoes. We lack enough funds for better managing of the project. (Naw, men)***

### **Community needs/problems**

Many issues were identified by the communities when probing about project weaknesses. On reflection, these are not really weaknesses of the project, but are reflections of community needs (wishes, hopes, plans). As such, they are on the border between weaknesses (competing needs and interests) and opportunities (for applying the new skills, locally generated funds, and improved contacts with the governmental sectors).

Fisheries (details mostly from Surgalm, Siromj, Baghan) – need for more infrastructure: training facilities, boat shelter, gas station for boats and vehicles, access road. Need for equipment, some of which is expensive: ice making machine, commercial refrigerator/freezer, and nets.

Employment (details from everywhere) – high unemployment, especially for youth, regardless of education

Social welfare and services – examples included needing a health house (Surgalm, Baghan), a secondary school (many), day care facility (many), building for a library (many), recreational centre for youth/children (many), training facility for adults including women (many).

Environment - equipment and tools for cutting mesquite trees beside the road and within the village; this is a thorny tree, promoted by forestry for desertification control, not eaten by camels or goats; is now overgrowing the village, road, and palm plantations. (Surgalm village)

## **Opportunities and resources**

### **Human resources**

This project has demonstrated that there are many people available and interested in this kind of project, from the residents of the communities, to individual technical staff in the various development and service sectors, to members of private and public companies. There are many young people with and without education who are ready to work and participate in developing the villages. Local communities are enthusiastic to improve and continue the project, and women are also interested and even eager to participate. Many resource people are present in the communities, and can be mobilised, e.g., behvarz, teachers, village council members, and other local leaders including religious leaders.

### **Partnerships and sectoral/institutional collaboration**

In multisectoral meetings, government sectors expressed strong interest at the district level for participation with local communities in their development, including supporting the sanduqs. It is important to also note the existence of an appropriate environment in the country for participation, given the existence of supporting government policies, including Islamic Village Councils.

UNICEF and other partners of the project have shown their willingness to assist in supportive and educational activities. UNICEF expressed a particular desire to work with provinces and communities on ways to promote child rights. NGOs including CENESTA are eager for learning from the experiences of the ABP and employing these lessons in the continuation and expansion of the project, even if current sponsors are no longer involved.

#### Specific sectors

- Health - The health sector, in particular, has re-emphasised its enthusiasm for this kind of project and its outcomes that they have already seen. Health has pointed out that they are the only sector in contact with all the households in the community, e.g., through the annual household surveys of the behvarz workers. In Bandar-Abbass, the PMD indicated strong interest in the outcome of the project, and said they have the means to implement it elsewhere in the province. In Dehdasht, the district doctor was willing to donate some health-related reading materials to the village libraries.
- Education - Suggestions were made that more or better linkages could be made between the project and the literacy movement educators; while not as prevalent as health workers (the village behvarz) at village level, the literacy movement teachers are quite widely distributed in the rural areas.
- Ministry of Jihad – In Marivan, the Ministry representative indicated readiness to assist through occasional training, e.g., fishing, and animal husbandry. They are also ready to give books to village libraries if interest is expressed by the communities.
- Social welfare organisation – in Marivan, the social welfare representative said they are ready for training children about different issues.
- Women's commission – in Marivan, the representative emphasised that the ladies commission is working to raise the awareness of women and their main goal is to provide services to women. They have a project on empowerment of women, with research to find out the situation of women. There is another project on rights of women.

Separate from the question of larger scale extension of the project, e.g., in whole districts or in new regions of the country, the levels of local interest and information sharing around project communities have demonstrated the possibility of expanding the model to adjoining areas through local community organizations and local efforts. This is where the supporting sanduq idea is also applicable, i.e., sanduqs located in a regional marketing centre or sub-district/district headquarters that have a more skilled co-ordinator and can provide assistance to multiple village level groups.

#### **Alternative sources of funds**

Much as this project has been able to benefit from a significant input by UNICEF, such funds are limited, especially in comparison with the needs of the rural and poor areas of the country. In discussions and meetings during the evaluation, the respondents/participants identified several alternative sources of funds that could be tapped for future work, either in the existing areas or for expansion/extension to new areas. The principal categories of resources were as follows:

- Public sector - Governmental financial resources; Article 3 has money for job creation, small industries; there is government money available for animal husbandry, for drought prevention, for underground water, for banana planting.
- Private sector - Financial resources of factories, companies, wealthy individuals. This is already happening in some areas, e.g., the Gohert village wholesale enterprise.
- Alternative IGAs – division of flat rangelands that have high production capacity for farming (e.g., in Amir Abad), use of existing mines, interest-free/low interest loans, export of products (e.g., shoes to Germany), marketing local products more broadly around the country (e.g., walnuts, bottled water)

At the present time, the district governor's offices do not keep a notebook or file with written descriptions of all the kinds of funds available and their regulations, e.g., amounts, criteria for obtaining, or other guidelines. While there is no such documentation at the present time, local officials are quite interested in this idea (e.g., the Deputy District Governor in Jask).

Respondents recommended using these resources (government and otherwise) in effective models, e.g., the sanduqs as a mechanism for job creation in the rural villages. People appreciated the sanduq approach of investing money in an income generating strategy for the community, with continued investment of returns to increase community wealth and then using some of the returns to address community development needs. Channelling funds through the sanduq rather than holding them at central level is another way of increasing local capital. The respondents also suggested that it would be appropriate for project communities to already be working on accessing various additional funds to address community priorities, rather than being dependent on a single project such as the ABP. Depending on the money in the Sanduq, the community can start other projects and respond to other development needs.

## ***Threats and dangers***

### Magnitude of need

Needs are much greater than readily available local resources in the project communities, which were largely selected because of their poverty. People have demonstrated capacity to think about their problems, and even to develop solutions for them, but lack sufficient means at hand to rapidly address the problems. Some areas have made a start, but are constrained by access problems that are barriers to further development, e.g., wintertime in Oraman, a road to the sea in Siromj.

### Expectations

In the face of overwhelming need, it is not surprising perhaps that both communities and stakeholders have had very high expectations of the project. Sometimes communities have seen a window of hope and then expected immediate resolution of all the community problems, complaining that the donated funds were too small. In other settings, there were expectations that external solutions could be found, e.g., that the project would be able to bring in machinery to remove trash because local cultural values objected to manual labour on such issues. On the other side, some sectoral, NGO, and community respondents felt that the stakeholders' expectations of achievements were too high within the very short lifespan of the project.

### Conflict

Although generally there was a lot of goodwill toward and within the project, there were several areas of conflict that could be potentially difficult – within the present areas or in new areas. One was between the project and the co-operatives sector, due to overlapping but not entirely synchronous interests. The co-operatives staff believed that development resources should flow through their offices, whereas the project was demonstrating success by giving community control of such resources. Another potential conflict for the project was with some sectoral people who were concerned that the income-generating strategies of the project were going to be introducing a profit orientation in the villages and leading people away from production. There were also community/sector difficulties in particular locations, e.g., with the agriculture technical expert on water versus the community in Bar Aftab. In a few places, there were conflicts within the community, e.g., in Amir-Abad village about who was in control of the use of the library books and what to do if the books were damaged.

### Lack of partnership and good collaboration

Sectors – there has been limited participation by government sectors in the proposed projects, and lack of collaboration by all the sectors that are required to provide services to the villages. Some respondents complained of too much interference of the government sectors in the local affairs of the communities (non-participatory monitoring and supervision, one-sided decisions). There were also concerns that some government sectors are really looking at issues from a political viewpoint.

Stakeholders – there were complaints and concerns about the level of participation of the stakeholders. Some people felt that inadequate collaboration of the stakeholders in the village would lead to lost opportunities. There were complaints from community level about a perceived lack of adequate understanding of some of the stakeholders about the project and its components, resulting in a purely financial outlook toward the achievements.

Government - Government is sometimes hamstrung in its own capacity to help because of all the rules and regulations of bureaucracy; support is tied to plans, but there are no development plans articulated for sub-district and village levels.

### Apprehensions and disillusionment/despair

There were fears among some community people about the danger of a possible termination of the project due to lack of support and follow-up. There was concern by some sectoral people that if the fears of termination become too strong, people will abandon the project and become hopeless. Some sectoral staff were concerned about potential lack of interest among animators for continuation due to lack of financial incentive. In some communities, some people had become disheartened after referring directly to the government sectors for solving their problems; when there was lack of financial support and motivation they began to lose interest.

## Lessons learnt – for the future

This section presents respondent/participant ideas from the field about ways forward, with suggestions based on lessons learnt from the project to date. The main sub-headings in this section are:

- Expansion/extension
- Sustainability
- Capacity building
- Planning and co-ordination

### ***Expansion/extension***

#### Pilot project

The present project has been a small one, e.g., only three scattered villages out of 2000 in one province. The villages themselves are willing to help with sharing their experiences if it is extended, but they are unable to say whether it should be replicated or not.

***Right now, we are still a pilot project. Cannot say yet if it should be repeated.*** (Bar Aftab village)

UNICEF has made it clear that it is not willing to do a major extension of the project in the exact same format, due both to resource requirements and the risk of project dependence on external resources rather than local ownership. The implementing NGO has also emphasised that external agencies, including UNICEF, have little money in this country.

***We have said many times this is a pilot project only, and it is there to stimulate a movement. Anything bigger will have to come from other sponsors, e.g., government and community.*** (GENESTA staff)

This pilot project has developed and tested one general approach to community development (i.e., local animators leading to community organisations – sanduqs – with a strong focus on participation, economic sustainability, and improving the conditions of women and children), with some variations linked to local choices and circumstances (e.g., differences in microcredit versus community investment, in shops versus boats). It has worked with one implementing NGO and a relatively small number of communities and individuals (animators and committees) for a rather short period of time (functionally implementing for little more than a year).

#### Opportunities

New areas - The Ministry of Health and UNICEF are jointly considering a disparity reduction project that would go to five provinces. Both stakeholders are interested in strategies for adopting/adapting elements of the ABP exercise in the new project. Both have also expressed interest in how to do the effort at a larger scale than the small scattered pilot operation of the ABP.

Same areas – Some local authorities, e.g., in Kurdistan, are very interested in how the project can be extended to include a much larger number of communities in the existing districts.

#### Preconditions for replication and/or extension

Government links - There was general agreement among the stakeholders that the community is capable, but there was also recognition that some linkages are needed with authorities at the next

level up in order to support and co-ordinate any extension. A related concern for ensuring the success of expansion is institutionalisation and co-ordination; some people wanted to know how to do it because it did not seem to them to be strong anywhere yet.

**Perhaps there should be some people who are linked with community and sectors. Not sure what level, e.g., district or other. So all that is done there is linked, less duplication. This is a good idea, but not happening.** (UNICEF, Yasuj)

Reviewer note: this is not a bad idea, if taken as a functional issue, but it could be potentially harmful if it was conceived that it had to be very structured and the same structure in all locations.

Selection of villages – several respondents urged that in future, project areas should be selected to include contiguous communities, in ways that encourage the support of different sectors as well as mutual reinforcement among communities. At the same time, one of the factors contributing to high levels of achievement in the ABP has been the expectation and demonstration of commitment by the participating communities.

In responding to both of these concerns, these desires may be most easily achieved by working with entire administrative units, e.g., sub-districts. To do so will require that a collaborative team (with community and sectoral representatives) work out a strategy for identifying administrative units in need, and then clarifying those that can go further to make commitments to the project, and what the nature of their commitment and contribution would be in order to become recognised as collaborative development partners.

#### Collaborative management/shared ownership

As the team moved around for the evaluation, there were many discussions in which it became clear that the various stakeholders are looking for strategies for sharing ownership.

**The Government's Third Development Plan puts attention to rural communities, believing that this will reduce urban migration. This means we have to have villages based on what they want and we have to have provincial government with more responsibilities, but also community involved. Community participation and intersectoral collaboration have to work together, side by side.** (MoH, Yasuj)

## **Sustainability**

### Current locations

The future situation is not yet clear for the existing 15 communities. At this stage, they are still nascent as self-sustaining development agents. They are only beginning to find their own strengths, to make their own linkages with sectors and to establish independent sources of funds (either from their community investments or through engaging co-funding from affluent community members and their relatives).

Respondents at central level, e.g., MoH and UNICEF were wondering how soon it would be possible to stop support in order to support other areas/other projects. Respondents at community and sub-district level were wondering how long the support could be sustained in order to facilitate consolidation and ensure sustainability of their work.

While both sides acknowledge that participatory processes take a lot of time, neither side has yet sorted out appropriate indicators for sustainability (of planning, activities, human resources/capacity, and financial capability) or the timeliness for discontinuing external support. Potential ideas include:

- To what extent local institutions are capable of carrying on (from MoH)
- People's level of confidence and trust in their future (from Bar Aftab village)
- When good results are reached by the communities (Yasuj meeting)

### Strategies of support

Three main strategies of support to continue participatory community development were identified by participants during the fieldwork for the evaluation.

These included external support to government for local activities, e.g., from UNICEF.

**UNICEF wants to provide support to government sectors, rather than to a series of small communities. UNICEF will support government, but not take over for/from them. Wants to use seed money, not continuous support.** (Yasuj, UNICEF staff)

A second key strategy that was outlined looked at how to move government resources out to the communities, and how to give communities a stronger voice in the use of those resources for direct problem-solving. The emphasis here that emerged was on finding mechanisms to facilitate the community, e.g., by allocating some government resources to community funds for local budgeting and management of community plans.

**To get the financial support of the government into the Sanduq, i.e., to channel development funds through the Sanduq so that the profit margin of the money will come to the community rather than an outside contractor, as well as helping to get the best quality for the money.** (Surgalm village, CENESTA staff and sanduq co-ordinator)

### Distributive justice

The third key strategy is advocacy for distributive justice, e.g., ensuring that the needs of the vulnerable are really attended to within the community and the region. While this is already the avowed concern of the sanduqs, some voices were reminders that this concern needs constant attention.

**Would like ways to work better with sharing resources from the haves to the have-nots.** (Bar Aftab village, woman behvarz)

**We are requesting that the stakeholders (and evaluation team) reflect concerns of the village to higher authorities, and pressure local government by sharing information about local conditions abroad.** (Oraman village, animator)

## Capacity building

### General

Communities and stakeholders exhibited a lot of enthusiasm for capacity building, which was generally equated with training, believing that increasing awareness and knowledge would contribute to better unity in the communities and more effective implementation of community plans. People also suggested that more in-depth attention to the capacities of local communities with respect to their needs would help in giving direction to these capabilities (e.g., at the Yasuj meeting).

Some of the requests and recommendations for capacity building were generic, e.g., putting up a training and workshop facility in the community that could be used by men, women, and adolescents/youth for learning and using skills (such as those in the following set of topics). Training was desired for village council members, as well as the general public of men, women, and youth.

Other requests (mostly from community respondents) were for specific content on topics ranging from rights to income generation. The following list gives an indication of the range of community interests:

- Income generation – rug making skills, shoe making skills (especially how to make the soles), finding markets, improving technology (e.g., making shoes water resistant),
- Rights – increase awareness of child and women rights, how to identify needs, becoming aware of laws that affect achievement of rights; skills training for women and girls
- Health – nutrition, nutrition needs of children, feeding for pregnant mothers
- Planning – for sustainable development, how to promote community participation
- Information sharing – including site visits to profitable projects
- Computers – training for men and women

Another aspect of capacity building that was reiterated in various communities was a request for more books for the small community libraries. In one village, the women were very specific about what they wanted.

**We women want some cookbooks, including urban type cooking.** (Bar Aftab village, women group)

## **Planning and co-ordination**

### Focal point – community

Most respondents were impressed with community planning and implementing capabilities and recommended that the focal point for development planning should be at community level.

***We expect government to come to village and hear people's voice, not to only be there at high level. Problems of the village need to be prioritised.*** (Bar Aftab, animator, Yasuj)

While the emphasis was on community-based planning, there was also a strong recognition that government does have a role and that it needs co-ordination.

***Government can't just pour money – there needs to be a plan, and it should be a plan of the community.*** (UNICEF, Marivan meeting)

***Have seen a lot of projects over the years. Since they were planning from the top down, evaluations have shown they were not successful. Need bottom-up planning and co-ordination of sectors.*** (Women's commission representative, Marivan meeting)

### Focal point - government

Although fewer people suggested it, there were some who wanted to emphasise the government role, and then involve related sectors in the implementation of community level projects on a case by case basis (e.g., MoH).

One part of the debate about government's role in co-ordination was linked to concerns about supervision. Sectoral people within government have had a tendency to believe that it is their role to supervise, and they have seen supervision as a technical support issue. Others, such as the implementing NGO, have argued that technical support can come in the form of advice, but the core issue is collaboration in management to capitalise on the strengths of community, government and other participating stakeholders. This approach requires the participation of government with its technical skills, but does not presuppose that government is automatically more knowledgeable than the community about the local situation. The following small section notes some recommendations from the field to help address such assumptions by government staff.

### Overcoming current constraints (and bureaucracy)

At the Yasuj meeting, several good recommendations were made about how to improve government support to participatory community development projects:

- Eliminate unsatisfactory practices of government agencies
- Ease government bureaucracy and make regulations more flexible in such projects so that the government sectors can easily work with project implementers
- Create opportunities for the participation of other interested and effective sectors

Similarly, in the Marivan meeting, the District Governor agreed that there are legal obstacles, and that it is now necessary to find solutions for these regulatory constraints. In Surgalm village, the co-ordinator suggested that the project should help to register the Sanduq and thereby get them recognised by the government.

### Monitoring

Several good recommendations about monitoring in participatory projects like the ABP emerged from the Yasuj meeting; they are listed as follows:

- The objectives of the project to be carefully followed up and regularly monitored, since positive outcomes will strengthen good ideas
- Creating opportunities to discuss the projects, analyse achievements, study and evaluate them at specific intervals by the communities themselves
- Appropriate initial assessment in order to identify precise strategies and the role of monitoring and evaluation at every stage

### Support requested/recommended from specific sectors

Community members had ideas already about which sectors they would like to work with and get more support from. The following list is an aggregated list of ideas from all of the villages, without

trying to represent how frequently the requests were voiced by the different communities, nor linking the requests to details of the current situation and costs of a proposal. It is presented here to illustrate the range of opportunities for sectoral links with priority needs of the communities.

- Health - to build a health house and select the behvarz from the community with the support of community and MoH. To establish health education courses and content on family planning for women. To implement health projects for women.
- Education - to build a lower (or 'junior') secondary school within the village with the support of the ministry for education and the community. To provide opportunity for village secondary school graduates to go on with technical training and jobs in rural affairs, health, fishery, co-operatives, communication centre, literacy movement, etc.
- District governor - to create new jobs for youth; establish facilities for youth (including sports, training workshops, etc.)
- Fishery corporation – development of a shelter for fishery and harbourage; improved access to fishery licenses
- Physical education office - creation of sports facilities
- Water and waste water corporation – access to drinking water at the seaside/shore for fishing communities
- Ministry of Jihad – to invest in other projects for the goals of the village

Interestingly, when communities were probed more deeply about needs, resources and constraints that prevented resolving the problems, it was possible to find that at least some of the resources already exist in the communities and can be tapped through careful facilitation. See the following example from Gohert village.

In Gohert village, the evaluation team engaged a group of men, including the local male animator (who is very energetic) in a discussion about community needs and plans. During this discussion, the community members recommended establishing health education courses for ladies by the health department. However, when the team asked about various kinds of local resource persons, it became evident to the participants that maybe they had some people locally who would be even more culturally acceptable as health educators. The request for external support gradually changed into plans to activate a local health education team, probably comprised of the former female behvarz and possibly some of the TMWs, with some support to come from the Sanduq.

A similar discussion and rethinking occurred when the Gohert men recommended implementation of short-term projects concerning health issues for ladies by UNICEF and health department. In this case, it was acknowledged that the local sanduq (a wholesale grocery enterprise) is doing extremely well, even though a full accounting has not yet been done. Rather than waiting for the full accounting report, or going through the difficulties of getting external support, the participants adapted their plan to arrange an advance of funds from the Sanduq that would be used to set up a separate account for the women and children activities. The store manager (who is also the animator) suggested an initial amount of about 200,000 Tomans, i.e., about US\$250. The Sanduq will write a letter to the District Governor and using support from CENESTA arrange for the account to be established.

## Recommendations

**Continuity** – this project has been instrumental in stimulating local development activities in the identified project communities, but it is far too early for termination of support (particularly technical, advocacy and monitoring support) to these communities. A continuity strategy should be developed in partnership with the communities, with government representatives responsible for those communities, and with the implementing NGO for continuity.

**Replication** – this project has been highly successful in the short run, and has many elements worth emulating in other areas of Iran, including the promotion of community animators, bottom-up planning, sanduq development committees with community investment funds and local wealth generating activities.

**Selection of communities** - In responding to concerns for working with committed communities, and expanding to cover more areas, these desires may be most easily achieved by working with entire administrative units, e.g., sub-districts. To do so will require that a collaborative team (with community and sectoral representatives) work out a strategy for identifying administrative units in need, and then clarifying those units that can go further to make commitments to the project, and what the nature of their commitment and contribution would be in order to become recognised as collaborative development partners.

**Monitoring** - Several good recommendations about monitoring in participatory projects like the ABP emerged from the Yasuj meeting; they are listed as follows:

- The objectives of the project to be carefully followed up and regularly monitored, since positive outcomes will strengthen good ideas
- Creating opportunities to discuss the projects, analyse achievements, study and evaluate them at specific intervals by the communities themselves
- Appropriate initial assessment in order to identify precise strategies and the role of monitoring and evaluation at every stage

**Accountability to communities about finances** - This may require more community meetings, or possibly a visible posting of on-going (e.g., monthly) income and expenses, perhaps with simple charts using symbols that are easily understood by all, including non-literates.

**Improving government links/support** - In Surgalm village, the co-ordinator suggested that the project should help to register the Sanduq and thereby get them recognised by the government. At the Yasuj meeting, several good recommendations were also made about how to improve government support to participatory community development projects:

- Eliminate unsatisfactory practices of government agencies
- Ease government bureaucracy and make regulations more flexible in such projects so that the government sectors can easily work with project implementers
- Create opportunities for the participation of other interested and effective sectors

**Library support** - Mobilise books, handouts, and other materials for the community libraries that teach about development, e.g., books on poultry rearing, irrigation, or improving agriculture. Such documents could come from government sectors, universities, national and international agencies. These kinds of books would be widely appreciated not only by the youth but also by the adults in the community that are trying to improve their conditions. In addition, mobilise additional books in languages specifically relevant to the local communities, where possible.

**Alternative sources of funds** - The respondents suggested that it would be appropriate for project communities to already be working on accessing various additional funds to address community priorities, rather than being dependent on a single project such as the ABP. Channelling government funds through the sanduq rather than holding them at central level is another way of increasing local capital. Respondents recommended using these resources (government and otherwise) in effective models, e.g., the sanduqs as a mechanism for job creation in the rural villages. Depending on the money in the Sanduq, the community can start other projects and respond to other development needs.

## Options for the future

### For the present three province area-based project (15 villages)

- a) Continue longer
  - To see if sectors can be brought in, probably in a bottom up way, but possibly through increasing pressure from above to co-operate, if not collaborate
  - To see how community participation and planning can direct local resources to their own health priorities, in addition to putting attention on their economic needs
  - To see what development and health changes are possible over a 4-5 year project lifespan (rather than 1 ½ years)
  - To clarify what the phase out criteria will be, and when the phase out plan would be generated (which would include responsibilities of all stakeholders and timing)
- b) Consider what inputs needed for the present project to advance
  - Health related efforts, e.g., better links with behvarz, RHC and sub-district; assigning some local funds and activities specifically to the health related priorities
  - Specific village plans (not just generic)
  - Support for sub-district councils, and building the role of village co-operation/collaboration for joint action/common voice, sharing ideas among communities
  - Training in simple accounting and a consistent system
  - Training in participatory monitoring and evaluation (have already had some in participatory design), generating indicators from the communities, getting a process going of using locally understandable tools for review and checking progress
  - Review information sharing strategies/methods for work with low literate groups
- c) Consider ways to work with the present project longitudinally
  - Possibly shifting home sector sponsorship (e.g., to Jihad?)
  - Possibly shifting donor/sponsor (e.g., to UNDP?, Jihad?, Central Agricultural Bank?); possibly collaborative sponsorship
  - Function as a training facility for the next phase, e.g., for the disparity reduction project
  - Need to consider the implications of being a training study site for the community (benefits and risks; opportunities and threats; quid pro quo)

### For any extension, e.g., with the disparity reduction project (5 provinces)

- d) Consider a phased approach
  - Consider starting at sub-district level (or possibly sub-district and district) for support to community development, drawing on lessons from the area-based project model (workshop, animator, sanduq, co-ordinator, and supportive facilitation) keyed to locally specific priorities and locally prepared plans of action
  - Consider best implementing agent(s)/partners and nature of partnership agreements/collaborative management plan
  - Assign carefully selected and prepared persons, with long enough assignments and adequate transport/logistical support to be effective (important to create successes and build on successes)
- e) Consider multiple implementing groups
  - Serious review of opportunities and threats of relying on existing infrastructures (and NGOs)
  - Utilise a reward linked process for effective work, possibly competitive depending on opinions about possible benefits/harms of this approach
  - Assess option of a competitive bid process for selection, with careful selection criteria
- f) Build in a regular review process
  - Broad categories of issues to monitor might include health status, household health behaviour and responsibility, community services and responsibility
  - To be done collaboratively, including the community level; linked to an agreed plan and set of indicators (which may be refined or adapted during the project lifespan to flexibly respond to community concerns and capacities)
  - To have a prior agreement that the fundamental approach will not be changed abruptly or lightly

- To agree that the process will not be changed drastically without consideration for initiatives that have already been started

#### Exploratory work

- g) Try a similar exercise in one (or more) subdistrict(s)
  - Reach all village in the sub-district, and have the full area be the mandate
  - See what can happen with engaging fuller intersectoral participation
  - Try to get collective/collaborative efforts going among the villages as well as the sectors
  - Build in participatory needs/resource/solution and planning work (strategic and action level)
  - Explore linkages to existing information systems, as well as locally developed and monitored indicators
  
- h) Gather more information about participatory work in Iran
  - Regardless of sector, though perhaps with special interest in 'health and well being'
  - Consider also information from surrounding countries that share any similar cultural/behavioural patterns
  - Look at both urban and rural settings
  - Look at traditional and modern forms
  - Assess the effectiveness using some kind of semi-structured analysis, i.e., with a combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators (see UNICEF TZ extract of discussion on best practices)
  - Look into communication strategies for low literate groups

## ANNEXES

### ***Methodology used in the ABP evaluation***

#### **Main approaches**

This was a very participatory evaluation, both in the members of the team (which included all three key stakeholders – MoH, UNICEF and CENESTA), and in the techniques that were used for information gathering about the project. The principal methods were as follows:

- Semi-structured interviews – list of topics/themes to explore; with stakeholders, gatekeepers, and residents, both male and female
- Focus group – assigning discussion about a set of topics or guiding questions, and then handing over to the community; followed by discussion with probes; conducted with men and women separately; occasionally with youth
- Village walkabout – viewing achievements and problems in the community; seeing aspects of everyday community life; conducted with community animator/co-ordinator and some residents
- Participatory observation – eating and sleeping in the community, using community facilities; seeing their shops, storerooms, latrines, homes, etc.
- Participatory plenary/large focus group meeting with multiple stakeholders (using idea cards); conducted with sectoral and intersectoral groups plus community animators and co-ordinators
- Documents review (for materials available in English)

#### **Specific techniques/tools in groups (summary)**

- SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) and SW/R (strengths, weaknesses and recommendations); focused on the ABP project. Note that the weaknesses often yielded unmet needs in the community level discussions.
- Collaborative review of community documents (maps and action plans) – discussing point by point about what has changed or been achieved since the documents were originally prepared
- Social group assessment – free listing of groups, age/gender of members, size of membership, main activities and link to Sanduq
- Participatory mapping of resources and risks in the community – multiple persons contributing to the drawing simultaneously (e.g., with boys in Lenj Abad).
- Decision-making – free listing of decisions being made, who is the leader/main decision-maker, and other participants; recommendations for improved decision-making. Much of the recommendations had to do with specific decisions.
- Benefit/harms or risks analysis – for decisions that were difficult that the community wanted to make, e.g., how to compensate an animator.
- Indicator analysis – identification and prioritisation (based on feasibility and sensitivity) of indicators for children and women well-being and for Sanduq committee performance. Free listing for identification, with probes and suggestions of additional ideas by various experts after the community puts theirs up first. Prioritisation using buzz groups for discussion (allows similar categories of people to work together, helps ensure there are enough people talking together that at least one is literate enough to record the results of the discussion), with contributions by the community residents first, confirmed as to whether the same issue is present on the lists of any other groups, and then followed by additional items from the lists of the other (non-community) participants.

#### **Additional issues**

- Early meetings with key stakeholders before going to the field requested their inputs about highlighting any topics or issues to explore in the field
- The implementing agency was picking up ideas from the earlier evaluation experiences and reviewing some topics with community animators at the time of mobilising them for the evaluation.

## **Methodology – outcomes with specific tools**

### **General comment on participatory tools**

Communities generally responded very positively to the variety of participatory tools that were utilised in the evaluation/assessment. In addition, the stakeholders (UNICEF, MoH, and CENESTA) were all quite eager to learn new participatory methods when we tried them out for these settings.

### **Specific tools used**

#### Assessment of progress toward plans

This exercise was conducted in Surgalm and Siromj, and revealed considerable differences in levels of understanding the plan, as well as achievements toward the aims of the plan. Although communities did not have the plan memorised, they did seem to have some general understanding of the elements in the plan as they were probed about them. It seems that the elements have been discussed, though possibly not reviewed in such detail previously. The community response to the exercise, however, seemed to indicate that a careful review of this kind could be part of at least an annual internal review in the project, and possibly even more often. This could be useful in triggering the community to consider ways to ask itself how they are doing with their plan.

#### Strengths, weaknesses, recommendations (SWR) and Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats (SWOT)

These tools were used in two different settings – the shorter one in some of the villages (e.g. in Bar Aftab and Amir Abad), and the longer one in some of the larger meetings (e.g., Yasuj). Respondents in the villages were generally quite good at identifying strengths, but somehow the concepts of weaknesses and recommendations were usually understood as “community needs” rather than “project weaknesses” or “areas of the project needing improvement”. This may have been a genuine belief that the project has no inherent problems of its own, a difficulty in translating the concept of project weakness, or it may represent evaluation fear and unwillingness to reveal weaknesses because they perceive that it might cause alterations in support to the village.

#### Participatory mapping

The approach used to a mapping exercise in Lenj Abad seemed to be a new exercise for CENESTA and the community – facilitating multiple people working on the same map at the same time rather than breaking them up into pairs or individuals to do the map. The boys’ map, with drawing efforts by at least a half dozen boys, and contributions from about 10-12 boys, ended up less pretty but more informative than the women’s map done at the same time. The women’s map was drawn by one person with contributed ideas from a group of women and girls.

Once completed, the maps previously created by the communities in the project have not so far been used as an active tool in the process of self-evaluation and monitoring of project achievements. Former maps were not always easy to locate, or not in the village; and people had not been looking back at the maps since the initial stages of planning the projects in the different villages. No updating of maps had taken place, e.g., showing new latrines, new roads, home gardens, project stores, new houses, or even deaths and outbreaks of disease.

#### Social group profile

The social group profile tool was used in Lenj Abad village, and resulted in an active discussion that fully engaged the participants. It revealed many issues that were new to the stakeholders from outside of the community, i.e., CENESTA, UNICEF and MoH. Representatives of two of these stakeholders (UNICEF and MoH) had previously asserted that community based organisations do not exist in Iran.

#### Indicator development

The indicator exercise, as conducted in Kikan village, was done quite well by the community. With more time, they clearly would have been able to carry it further for identifying specifics of indicators for actual monitoring, not just conceptual themes. At the same time, it seems that the project had not yet focused any effort on this rather crucial step. The external experts from the stakeholders and the local elites (such as the school teachers and behvarz) were quite impressed with the list coming from the farmers, as well as their selection of important issues. There is a lot of interest by community

people and technical people in community level indicators for analysis of village changes/achievements/outcomes.

### Decisions and decision-makers

The analysis of decisions and decision makers was new to the project, as was the benefits/risks analysis for possible decisions and courses of action. Both of these tools were quite effective at getting participation in the community. They are relatively simple tools to use, but powerful for facilitating work in the community on sticky issues.

### Documentation techniques

The idea of consistent and complete labelling of community-generated products seemed to be a new approach to the communities and to CENESTA. When some of the older documents, such as maps were reviewed, it was not always possible to tell who or what kinds of persons had been involved in producing the documents. This can make it difficult for comparison or clarifying at later points in time.

The use of idea cards was an exciting innovation for many participants in the larger meetings where it was used. People appreciated the democratic opportunity for all voices and concerns to be heard. There were occasionally some persons with limited writing skills, but doing the exercise in Farsi, and ensuring that some willing persons helped the slower writers, facilitated good idea sharing for the group.

## **Social group profile – process and results**

The social group profile tool was used as a participatory exercise with a group of about 20-25 men and youth in Lenj Abad village. The discussion that resulted was quite active and completely taken over by the group.

### **Lenj Abad village – social groups**

No.	Name of group	Sex	Size	Main activities	Link with Sanduq
1.	Sanduq board of directors	M	8	Active role in the Sanduq	XX
2.	Sanduq committee	M, F	14	Make decisions over Sanduq	XX
3.	Sanduq general assembly	M, F	240 (120 each)	Surveillance over the Sanduq	XX
4.	Rural Islamic Council	Male	3		Member of Sanduq committee
5.	Literacy movement	M, F	30	Making people literate	Using books
6.	Rural rep group		12	Religious affairs	
7.	Parents and children association	M	7	Bridge between parents and students, school problems	
8.	Rural co-operative company	M	2	Agricultural affairs, repairing equipment	
9.	Rural industries co-operative	F	12	Rural small scale industries	
10.	Rural special task groups	M	4	Follow up village special problems	
11.	Consuming co-operation	M, F	18	Purchase community needs	
12.	Ghaderi dervish group	M, F	100 (60,40)	Praying and meditation	
13.	Nakshbandi group	M, F	200 (100 each)	Praying and meditation	
14.	Elder group	M	10	Solving disputes between people	
15.	Rural leaders (white bearded men, white haired women)	M, F	200 (100 each)	To oversee the elder group	
16.	Health volunteer	M, F	4	Identify problems, health, support health house	
17.	Lenj Abad HHs living in cities		80	Helping in agriculture	
18.	Aid committee		40	Helping the needy people	
19.	Youth association	M, F	50	To discuss about social, cultural and economic issues	
20.	Rural assembly of women	F	40	Family health issues	

Many issues emerged that were new or interesting to the participants, and especially so for the stakeholders from outside of the community, i.e., CENESTA, UNICEF and MoH (representatives of the latter two had previously been convinced that community based organisations do not feature in rural Iran). The stakeholders became quite enthusiastic about the social group exercise when they started to understand some of the implications:

- Entry points for health (and other kinds) of education

- Groups that can positively influence the Sanduq (or obstruct it)
- Entry points for project-related (or vulnerable target group related) activities that fit the agenda of the various groups

### Decision making in the community – process and results

In Oraman village, a participatory exercise was conducted with a group of men (farmers, teachers, elders, businessmen, local council representatives and young men) to explore local decision making processes related to the Sanduq. The group was facilitated to think of all the major kinds of decisions being made locally by or for the Sanduq, and then to think about who participates in the decisions – as the principal decision maker and the others who are also involved. The following table shows the results of this exercise.

#### Decisions and decision-makers related to the Sanduq (Oraman village, group of men; clustered by main decision-maker)

No.	Decisions	Main decision maker	Other persons participating in the decision process
1.	To purchase goods	Mr. Ahmadi, the animator	Shopkeepers, board of directors for the Sanduq
2.	Store capital	Mr. Ahmadi	Sanduq committee
3.	Pricing the merchandise	Mr. Ahmadi	Sanduq committee
4.	How to use the copy machine	Mr. Ahmadi	Sanduq committee
5.	To sell merchandise not by cash (give credit)	Mr. Ahmadi	Board of directors
6.	Salary for the store person	Sanduq committee	Local elders
7.	How to use the computer	Sanduq committee	Local council
8.	To make the decision for the Sanduq meetings	Sanduq committee	Board of directors
9.	In the case of robbery or fire, who is responsible for helping the needy	Sanduq committee	
10.	How to help the needy people	Board of directors	Mr. Ahmadi
11.	How to help the whole community	Board of directors	Local council
12.	To provide facilities for welfare activities	Board of directors	Local council, community
13.	To build a sport arena (football field) for youth	Board of directors	The youth, the local council
14.	To establish an appropriate place for baby delivery	Board of directors	
15.	To build grocery building	Board of directors	Mr. Ahmadi, local council, community
16.	Provision of funds for guests and Sanduq committee	Board of directors	Sanduq committee
17.	How to pay the salary of bookkeeper and executive director	Board of directors	Sanduq committee
18.	Training courses for family health and environmental health	Board of directors	Islamic council, Sanduq committee
19.	To change the activity of the Sanduq	Friday leader	Mr. Ahmadi
20.	Auditing (once in awhile)	Friday leader	The Sanduq committee, and inspector

Comment: this exercise generated enthusiastic participation by the community. The exercise was not hard to do, and could be a useful tool for community level participatory monitoring of community participation and sanduq performance. It demonstrated some of the local solutions and ways of working, ways that are not always codified in committee by-laws and organisational constitutions. It also helped to identify where there are some difficulties with decision-making. It would be very interesting to conduct a similar decision-making exercise with some of the other social categories in the community, e.g., women, youth, children – and get their perceptions about not only these decisions, but what decisions they think are important and how they think the decisions are made.

One particular decision was very difficult and agitating for the community – what to do about the compensation arrangements for the storekeeper. In the process of a rather warm discussion of the issue, several reasons came to the fore, e.g., that there are a lot of other shops in the community already, and the Sanduq store is underselling them, cutting away some of their business. The animator was concerned because his present role was unsustainable without some kind of support.

Recognising that there was potentially some conflicting opinions about this issue, the community was encouraged to do some benefit/risk assessment of options, starting with free listing of options and

then looking at the benefits and harms of the various options. The group ran out of time to complete this second exercise, but still felt that it had been helpful to them in exploring the balance of issues.

### Preliminary benefit/risk analysis of decision options for payment of shop manager (Oruman village, unranked listing)

Option for action	Benefits	Risks
Pay the storekeeper (animator) from the profits of the store (a percentage)	This way the salesman will work actively in order to get more profit The capital will stay in Promotes sustainability for the Sanduq Purchases will be made from cost-effective locations	The net profit is low since the capital is low Might lose the person who is active and committed Payment can't wait for the accounting every six months May have times of greater or lesser earnings
Increase the capital		
Get voluntary contributions from others in community		
Pay from the capital		The capital will decrease Cannot pay much, and the family of the salesman is large

Comment: this list is still incomplete, both in terms of the options available, and for filling in all the cells in the table, i.e., all the risks and benefits attached to the options. At the same time, the interest generated by the exercise demonstrated a strategy for conflict resolution/problem solving that may be useful in this and other communities in the project that are facing some difficulties with making critical decisions.

Demonstrating the preliminary nature of the list, and the opportunity for facilitating further discussion, as the car was leaving the village, two MoH staff (a driver and a central level expert) both contributed some additional options that could be considered:

- Relocate the store – there is a nearby village with no store, and a store in the alternate location would serve 3-4 mountain villages. It might raise more profit, serve more people, and not be seen as a direct competition by the existing storekeepers.
- Establish a wholesale enterprise instead of retail – could reduce the acquisition costs for the existing shopkeepers, lower costs for the community, and make more profit. Might be able to recruit the shopkeepers to invest in the wholesale business in exchange for a portion of the profits. It would be possible for the Oruman sanduq to learn how to do such an activity from the Gohert project in Hormozgan.
- Hire a younger shopkeeper – one without a large family to support. It would be cheaper, but would have the risk of losing the initiative and community linkages of the present shopkeeper
- Blend the strategies – it does not have to be a single solution, but could include a mixture of approaches.

### Assessment of progress toward plans – process and results

Below are two examples of performance against the plan by villages, as reported in focus group discussions with the village animators and some sanduq members. One community (Surgalm) has been far more successful in implementing their plan than the other. While there are many cultural and occupational similarities between the two villages, one of the critical differences affecting performance may be fact that the lower performing community is a 'new' community, having only come into existence three years ago. As such, social groupings may be still getting formed, there is less in the way of organised infrastructure, and the community is a bit more remote from the markets and educational centres for the region.

#### Surgalm village - Review of the short term action plan (i.e., for 1999)

Item in the plan	Status	Comments
Collection of local data	Done	People can remember the animators coming around to collect the information at their households
Activate female animator	Done	She is the wife of the male animator. He works in the grocery store.
Set up library and development house	Done	Was in the animator's home, now in the school. There have been no additions of new materials
Elaborate a local action plan	Done	This document

Help set up sanduq as local CBO	Done	Continues to be active
Starting IGAs in community	Done	Is the store. Strong interest to do other projects. Want a subsection of the store for personal hygiene items for women and contraception
Continue use of solar cooker	Partially done	7 cookers were distributed here; led to some conflicts because others wanted them also. All are working well
Construction of toilets	Partially done	None at the school. According to the animator, maybe "20%" do not; but according to the head of the Islamic Council and some of the others in the village who did a household by household tally, there are 50 HHs without, and 32 HHs with a latrine.
Computer training and use	Some	Some training done, including some by a researcher who stayed in the village for awhile. Some use locally for writing reports
Workshop on pre-school issues	Done	3 men, 3 women attended, came back and transferred ideas to rest of village. Some application in play with children
Training for TMWs and child growth cards	Not done	Tried to get the TMWs to go for training, but unwilling to go to town. Cards started, but on hold due to medical discomfort when there is not enough staff
Support to vulnerable groups	Done	Three children who needed help were identified in the village; one is a 'tree child', a child abandoned by outsider parents who was sleeping under trees – he has been fostered, and a sibling of his was already being fostered. Problem of getting ID cards for the children.
Periodic reports on progress	Done	Animators are writing regularly
Promotion of child rights	Partially done	Adoption/fostering of children. Identity promotion for children, and prevention of beating children

### Siromj village - Review of the short term action plan (i.e., for 1999)

Item in the plan	Status	Comments
Collection of local data	Done	Animator kept original data about HHs – has data in a notebook with assistance of his son. Was some discussion of results of the survey with community 1 year ago, and exchange of ideas. But results of the formal analysis are only coming back now. When baseline data was gathered, there had been 7 deaths of young children in the one year before the survey. 11 births in the past year, and three newborn deaths (neonatal mortality rate of nearly 300/1000)
Activate female animator	Attempted but none	Recruited two female animators, both aged TMWs and low activity; men did not follow-up. No literate women in the village
Set up library and development house	Little activity	Books received, but very little use. Report from team that on the last visit, the books had still been in their original wrappers. Now, some of the books are being read by about a half dozen children, but there is no system for keeping track of the books.
Elaborate a local action plan	Done	Members of the discussion group can recall some discussion last year after the data collection was done.
Helping set up the sanduq as a local CBO	Attempted	Some members from village council became the Sanduq committee plus three women, but the women gradually dropped out/became passive. The village recognised its lack of capacity and put their money in with that of the central Sanduq in Jask.
Starting IGAs in community	Not done	Transferred money to the central Sanduq. There have been no withdrawals, and they have not received any detailed accounting yet.
Continue use of solar cooker	Not done	The co-ordinator has received solar cookers for this community, but is waiting for them to come and get them so that there is some demonstration of commitment to their use.
Construction of toilets	Little activity reported by community	People said that before the project, they were using 'field toilets', i.e., the bush. Women reportedly said no toilets even now. Male animator reports, however, that there are 11 HHs that have toilets out of 35 (none of the 20 nomadic HHs have toilets). Project staff also report considerable activity in this area, though unfortunately constrained by following an expensive 'Pakistani' toilet model.
Computer training and use	Little activity	The male animator, who is mostly illiterate, has been the only one. While his learning to type on the computer is a remarkable achievement, some other communities had already spontaneously extended the opportunity to learn on the computer to other community members.
Workshop on pre-school issues	2 attended	The male animator and his daughter attended. The men's focus group did not recall any follow-up or discussions afterwards. The women's discussion group also there had been no follow-up.
Training for TMWs and child growth cards	None	The TMWs refused to move away from the village for training. Did get some growth card training, but no scale, no health house, and the RHC did not come to implement. The doctor from that unit is also gone; means the nearest services are close to Jask, about 45 kms from here. Nearest public transport is a ½ km walk to the highway
Support to vulnerable groups	Little activity	Made list of vulnerable HHs, including those suffering from an unusually common occurrence of progressive blindness in various ages; went to the RHC, got letters. Went to Welfare organisation where they were very slow but finally did files on the vulnerable children, and then no activity for months; after 7 months, they said they had lost the files. Went to the governor's office to complain; the organisation made files again, but still no action
Periodic reports on progress	Being done	Sometimes by the animator with his son; sometimes by CENESTA staff interviewing the animator and writing up the discussion

Promotion of child rights	Little activity	The animator reports that he told the parents, but little has happened. Some parents had no money for their children's school stationery, some can't help their children study because they are illiterate themselves.
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## Participatory development of community indicators – process and results

An exercise was conducted with a group of men in Kikan village that included farmers, teachers, the local behvarz, and some visitors with the evaluation team. The exercise was started by asking about the general concept of indicators, e.g., how do people in this community know how a child is doing with education. After this, the group was guided to discuss other indicators that are commonly used in the village. At this point, the group spontaneously came up with indicators for wealth. From there, the group worked on a list of indicators for children and women well-being, which they knew as an issue in their own community development plan.

### Indicators for children and women well-being (Kikan village, organised by group ranking results)

No.	Indicator	Vote
1.	Personal hygiene (bathing, taking care of finger nails and hair; brushing teeth; personal items like towel)	4
2.	Environmental health (wastewater disposal; solid waste management; disposal of animal waste; safe drinking water; pesticides and control of insects in home)	4
3.	Mental health	4
4.	Children's education	3
5.	Housing condition (e.g., walls)	3
6.	Women's occupation (women's income, job opportunities)	3
7.	Income	2
8.	Nutrition (facial colour/appearance; physical status; weight; growth; goitre)	2
9.	Recreation facilities (football pitch, etc.)	1
10.	No fighting of parents in front of their children	1
11.	Status of public places (markets, school, etc.)	1
12.	Appearance of women (clothing)	
13.	Not getting sick frequently; absence of disease	
14.	Using toys	
15.	Buying bicycle	
16.	Travelling (able to go on trips)	
17.	Home appliances (buying refrigerator, cooking implements)	
18.	Gold/jewellery	
19.	Not beating children for punishment	
20.	Not making children carry loads that are too heavy	
21.	Vaccinations for children and women	

The majority of the nominated indicators came from the farmers; some from various other 'experts', such as the behvarz, the teacher, and animators from the other villages in the project, and MoH staff visiting with the evaluation team.

Voting was done by dividing the groups into small buzz groups – there were two groups of farmers, one of teachers, one with the behvarz, one with animators from other villages, and one with MoH staff. The opinions of the farmer groups came first, then the behvarz for any additions, then the teacher, the other animators and finally the external experts. Voting or prioritisation was done on the basis of feasibility (ease/difficulty of obtaining the information) and sensitivity (rapidity/slowness of change).

Comment: this listing shows the potential for involvement of the community with monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of this participatory project on the most vulnerable target groups. Perhaps it is pointing out the obvious, but this newly generated list is as yet untested in this community, and has not yet been verified by conducting similar exercises with other groups in the same community (e.g., women, adolescents) or with other communities. However, both of these steps are ones that would not be difficult for the project to carry out.

Only a short amount of time remained, but in that time the group was very interested to start thinking about indicators for the performance of the Sanduq committee.

### Preliminary ideas about indicators for Sanduq committee performance (Kikan village, unranked)

1. Income generation
2. Boost the economy of the village

3. Conducting different activities
4. Increasing agricultural products from the village
5. Establishing Sanduq and community organisations
6. Accountability – reporting back on finances
7. Transparency – reporting back on decisions, and consultation in planning
8. Holding regular meetings
9. Accessibility – available and willing to listen to community concerns
10. Active participation of women and men members of the sanduq committee
11. To do practical programmes in consensus with the community
12. Activities proportional to needs of community and maintaining equity
13. Is the sanduq getting the interest of surrounding communities
14. Is the sanduq's capital increasing
15. The link of the sanduq with other organisations and sectors

Some of the indicators in this second list were nominated or suggested by various other visiting experts, but all of them were verified with the community members before including them on the list – so the list does represent some consensus of value, though it is still incomplete and not yet ranked or prioritised.

Comment: It would be useful to do it in some other communities, and to link the indicators chosen to various participatory methods for data collection and analysis so that the communities themselves could see how to track their own progress.

There are a number of other categories of indicators that could be usefully explored with such a strategy, for example:

- Social group function – how do community members assess the performance of their own social groups (see also social group tool in this methodology section)
- Project performance – what would be community-based criteria for tracking an agricultural project, or a community development project
- Performance of specific roles – e.g., the animator, or other special resource persons in a community (trying to do this in a way that focuses on criteria, not the specific person – if possible)
- Health behaviour of households – could extract and then develop further some of the criteria above for children and women well-being.
- Needy families – what would be community criteria for such households
- Community empowerment – what would be community criteria; how do they know if it is happening
- Female empowerment – what would be community criteria

## Draft Terms of Reference for Mid-Term Evaluation

<b>Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran/ Ministry of Health</b>	<b>Union of Community Funds for Sustainable Development</b>
<b>UNICEF-Iran</b>	<b>Centre for Sustainable Development</b>

### Area-Based Development in Iran

A Demonstration Project for Improving the Status of Children and Women through Integrated Participatory Community Development

#### Introduction

The Area-Based Development project is part of the UNICEF Country Programme for the Islamic Republic of Iran. The project has been implemented by the Centre for Sustainable Development (CENESTA) with the Co-operation of the Universities of Medical Sciences of the Provinces of Hormozgan, Kohgiluyeh-Boyer-Ahmad, Kurdistan (Ministry of Health and Medical Education), and other government agencies including the Ministry of Interior (local governments).

The project's main objectives are:

1. Protecting and promoting the rights of children and women and improving their health and well-being in three provinces of Iran that show negative disparities with national indicators (Kurdistan, Hormozgan and Kohgiluyeh-Boyer Ahmad);
2. Ensuring that such achievements remain sustainable beyond the life of the project.

To reach the above objectives, the project adopted a framework of working principles (such as cultural respect, transparency, mutual trust, sustainability) and a strategic approach focused on integrated, participatory community development for the creation of local *sustainable* wealth and capacities. The rationale for this approach is that the well being of women and children cannot be isolated from the well being of their communities and their natural environment. This is particularly true for rural folks in Iran, endowed with lively traditional customs and practices, dependent on their communities for social solidarity and cultural identity, and on the local natural resources for survival and economic needs. Only as members of well-organised communities in healthy and productive environments women and children of rural Iran have a good chance of a fulfilling life. In addition it is apparent that changing the status of women and children, including changing the traditions of nutrition and the role of women, requires changes in the dominant cultural and economic environment of the rural communities.

The project pursues enhanced awareness and action for women and child health and well being on three strategic pillars:

1. Community organising and empowerment;
2. Local wealth generation; and
3. Sustainable management of natural resources.

After initial surveys and contacts carried out by CENESTA in late 1997 and early 1998, the UNICEF-sponsored project officially began in August 1998 with the strong endorsement of the Ministry of Health and the signature of a contract based on the project document. However, the community activities only started in December 1998— after the first intensive participatory training and awareness-building workshop organised for the community animators. In other words, the lifetime of the project on the ground has been about 15 months as of March 2000.

The evaluation to be carried out in July 2000 will thus be an “early” or mid-term evaluation from the point of view of the involved communities and partners.

Due to the constraints of project cycles, however, this will be an evaluation at the end of its pilot phase for UNICEF. The evaluation will:

- c) Assess the process, results and preliminary impacts so far achieved;
- d) Assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the adopted strategic approach; and
- e) Provide recommendations to UNICEF, the government of Iran, CENESTA, the project institutional partners and the participating communities for optimising the project impacts and pursuing lessons learned in all appropriate contexts, including possible extension of the project in the original or new areas.

## Evaluation methodology and Terms of Reference for the mission

The Area-based project will be evaluated in terms of process, outputs and preliminary impacts on the health and well being of women and children in the fifteen pilot communities. It will also be evaluated regarding the surrounding conditions that may foster or impede the sustainability of the achieved gains. Quantitative and qualitative indicators and lessons learned shall be identified and assessed in field-based conditions. As some of the impacts will only be quantitatively discernible in the longer run, the evaluation exercise will attempt to estimate those on the basis of trends, qualitative indicators and prior experiences from similar projects elsewhere. A participatory evaluation approach will be adopted, involving all major project stakeholders: beneficiary communities, donors, partners and implementers.

The evaluator(s) will:

- Carry out a short literature review of projects and approaches aimed at enhancing women and child well-being in areas of unfavourable socio-economic and environmental conditions in various countries and environments. The review will focus on UNICEF projects but will not be limited to those;
- From the review, draw a summary report (a few pages) of lessons learned from prior projects. The lessons will be later counter-checked vis-à-vis the experience of the Area-based project in Iran;
- Once in Iran, meet with the national stakeholders in the project (Ministry of Health, UNICEF, CENESTA, etc.) And review their main concerns and expectations regarding the evaluation report to come;
- In collaboration with the national partners, devise a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess the project process, outputs and preliminary impacts in line with the project strategy (as outlined in the project document and subsequent additions), and on the basis of lessons learned in similar projects elsewhere;
- Visit project communities in the three provinces and, in close collaboration with local Community Animators, *sandug* committees, community members and provincial partners, review the identified indicators and any other lessons people may have learned along the way;
- Pay special attention to the views and experiences of women, children and community elders in the project communities;
- Pay special attention to the conditions for sustainability of the project gains;
- Hold a summary workshop in each of the three regions with the major stakeholders, discussing and finalising with them the evaluation's on-going results;
- Hold a final debriefing workshop with national stakeholders in Teheran;
- Prepare a final report including recommendations to the Ministry of Health, UNICEF, CENESTA, the project institutional partners and the beneficiary communities for optimising the project impacts and pursuing lessons learned in all appropriate contexts.

The mission will cover three to four weeks, of which one week could be spent outside Iran to prepare the initial review and write the final report.

## Programme for the evaluation

Tentative plan for evaluation of the Area-based Project

Entire evaluation team including MOH, UNICEF, CENESTA, and representatives of local CBOs

Date	Day	Activity	Province
Aug 26	Sat.	Arrival in Tehran; Meeting at UNICEF; Meeting with MOH Officials Travel to Shiraz	Tehran-Shiraz (Evening)
Aug 27	Sun.	Travel by land to Yasooj Meeting at Governor General's Office including health officials Travel to Amir-Abad village, lunch, Meeting with village animators, village people, introduction to village activities Return to Yasooj	Kohkilooyeh & Boyerahmad
Aug 28	Mon.	Travel to Bar-Aftab Village Meeting with animators and village people and introduction to village activities Return to Yasooj	
Aug 29	Tue.	Meeting at Governor General's office (inter-sectoral, including local community reps) Lunch; Return to Shiraz (local visits)	Travel Shiraz-Tehran
Aug 30	Wed.	Travel to Tehran Working on Report	Tehran
Aug 31	Thu.	Travel to Bandar-Abbass Provincial Health authorities Travel to Jask (lunch, handicrafts visit in Minab) Meeting with District Governor Travel to Surgalm village & dinner; Night at Surgalm village	Travel Tehran-Bandar Abbas
Sep 1	Fri.	Visit to fishing coast Meeting with animators & local community; Solar lunch Travel to Siromj village Meeting with village people and discussions on activities Travel to Gohert village Meeting with local community & animators; Overnight at Gohert	Hormozgan
Sep 2	Sat.	Travel back to Jask Visit to Central Community Investment Fund (joint project with Siromj) Meeting at District Governor (intersectoral) Travel to Baghan Village; Solar Lunch; Meeting with community and its project Travel to Bandar Abbas; Overnight in BA	
Sep 3	Sun.	Meeting at Governor General's Office and Provincial authorities Travel to Tehran Working on Report	Travel Bandar-A.- Tehran
Sep 4	Mon.	Stay in Tehran, work on evaluation report	Tehran
Sep 5	Tue.	Flight to Kermanshah Lunch in Paweh Travel to Naw village through Ouraman valley Meeting at Naw village with people, Walk to Hawar Naw and staying overnight	Travel Tehran-Kermanshah
Sep 6	Wed.	Walk to Hawar Road Travel to Ouraman village Visit to Ouraman, meeting with people and introduction to village activities Lunch; Travel to Marivan	
Sep 7	Thu.	Travel to Lenj Abad village Meeting at District Governor's office (inter-sectoral) Lunch at Lake Zariwar Travel to Kikan village; Meeting with local community Travel to Sanandaj	
Sep 8	Fri.	Working on report	
Sep 9	Sat.	Meeting at Governor General's Office (inter-sectoral) Travel to Kermanshah; Flight to Tehran	Travel Sanandaj- Tehran
Sep 10	Sun.	Work on evaluation report Discussions	Tehran
Sep 11	Mon.	Meetings with MOH, UNICEF, CENESTA, Final de-briefing with the Vice-Minister for Public Health, Dr. Sayyari Workshop planning	
Sep 12	Tue.	Final sum-up workshop	
Sep 13	Wed.	Final sum-up & planning workshop	
Sep 14	Thu.	Work on Report	
Sep 15	Fri.	Departure	

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## **Logical Framework of the Area-Based Development Project, Iran**

September 99 Summary Update & Revision of Project Logical Framework [As Prepared by CENESTA]

(The project implementing organisation– CENESTA– is responsible for project activities unless otherwise stated)

<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Activities</b>		<b>Main assumptions</b>	<b>% Done</b>	<b>Due</b>
<b>15 trained male community animators in 15 pilot communities in 3 project regions</b>	➤ Introductory visits to project areas including establishment of linkages with local government, health services, traditional leaders, etc.		Introduction and support from national political and health authorities	100	N/A.
	➤ Selection of pilot communities			100	N/A.
	➤ Assisting pilot communities to identify and appoint their own male animators			100	N/A.
	➤ Participatory analysis of training needs with animators			100	N/A.
	➤ Initial training of animators			100	N/A.
	➤ Further training of animators, including multi-sectoral training and workshops, e.g. on awareness of needs of women and children, the rights of the child			60	Dec 99
<b>15 trained female community animators in 15 pilot communities in 3 project regions</b>	➤ Assisting pilot communities to identify and appoint their own female animators		Introduction and support from national political and health authorities Trust and willingness of leaders and males in pilot communities	60	Nov 99
	➤ Participatory analysis of training needs with animators			60	Nov 99
	➤ Initial training of animators			60	Nov 99
	➤ Further training of animators including multi-sectoral training and workshops on identified needs			40	Dec 99
<b>Participatory initiatives to address main problems and opportunities in 15 pilot communities</b>	➤ Participatory community analysis of main local problems and opportunities <sup>5</sup>	All of these facilitated by community animators with the support of CENESTA, as needed	Communities willing to invest time and resources in analysis Cohesion and co-operation stronger than rivalries and internal conflicts Animators capable of mobilising their fellow community members Needed external resources and support available on time and in appropriate quantity and quality, including continuous support by CENESTA staff	100	Iterative process
	➤ Participatory planning of community initiatives (including sanduqs) and– as needed– development of project proposals			70	
	➤ Identification and procurement of outside support to implement initiatives			67	
	➤ Implementation of initiatives			15	
	➤ On going participatory monitoring and “learning by doing”			25	
	➤ Adjustment of initiatives and procurement of further resources as needed			15	
<b>Participatory initiatives to address the needs of women and children in 15 pilot communities</b>	➤ Participatory community analysis of situation of women and children	All of these facilitated by community animators with the support of CENESTA, as needed	Communities willing to discuss and analyse the specific needs of women and children Animators capable to mobilise their fellow community members (includes effective performance of female animators) Needed external resources and support available on time and in appropriate quantity and quality, including continuous support by CENESTA staff	50	
	➤ Identification and procurement of outside support to implement initiatives			50	
	➤ Implementation of initiatives			20	
	➤ On going participatory monitoring and “learning by doing”			20	
	➤ Adjustment of initiatives and procurement of further resources as needed			10	
<b>Internal and external “mid term” evaluation of area-based process and performance</b>	➤ External and internal review of area-based process and on-going results of participatory initiatives in 15 pilot communities		<b>Financial resources available, in particular to contract external evaluators</b>	15	

<sup>5</sup> These analyses were generally facilitated by existing male and female community animators. In most cases significant segments of the community participated in the exercises, including traditional leaders, male and female heads and members of households, youth and sometimes children. More detailed information is being compiled by animators.

**ANNEX: Project Logical Framework**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Adjustments of process (e.g. by provision of further training and inputs) following the evaluation results</li> </ul>			15	
<b>Strengthening sustainability of community initiatives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Full review and evaluation of initiatives by pilot communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ All of these facilitated by community animators with the support of CENESTA, as needed</li> </ul>	<p><b>Results of community initiatives available soon enough to demonstrate positive impact</b>                      Legal and administrative support available to set up CBOs                      Electronic means (computers and phone connections) available and performing adequately</p>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Celebration of results achieved and public discussion of lessons learned</li> </ul>			25	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Registration of action groups from pilot communities as CBOs</li> </ul>			25	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Setting up of electronic network linking the pilot communities and initiatives among themselves and with their non-local partners supporters</li> </ul>				
<b>Scaling up the area-based process to other communities in the 3 project regions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Full review and evaluation of area-based processes in pilot communities by health services in concerned regions</li> </ul>		<p>Results of community initiatives available soon enough to demonstrate positive impact in community well-being and the well-being of women and children in the pilot communities</p>	50	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Replication of area-based processes in new selected communities with facilitation provided by Community Animators and CENESTA</li> </ul>	30			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ On-going meetings of animators of pilot communities and animators of new selected communities to share and discuss lessons learned, jointly facilitated by community animators and CENESTA</li> </ul>	30			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Monitoring of new processes and "learning by doing" by health services personnel and relevant communities</li> </ul>	15			
<b>Scaling up the area-based process to new regions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Review and evaluation of area-based process by relevant authorities, health services, NGOs and other concerned partners from other regions</li> </ul>		<p>Understanding of processes involved, and convincingly demonstrated positive impact of area-based process and participatory initiatives on community well-being and the well-being of women and children</p>	50	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Planning and implementing area-based processes in other regions by the relevant actors</li> </ul>	50			
<b>Internal and external final evaluation of area-based impact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ External and internal review of area-based processes and results of participatory initiatives in 15 pilot communities and "scaled up" situations</li> </ul>		<p>Financial resources available, in particular to contract external evaluators</p>	5	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Adjustments of process (e.g. by provision of further training and inputs) following the evaluation results</li> </ul>	0			

**Reviewer comments:**

The project has largely been quite successful at meeting their appointed outputs and activities, as per the log frame – with the exception of extension to other areas and application of this model in other regions. This limitation was explained by the implementers as a revised plan in line with more limited funds than the initial proposal.

As a general comment, this log frame does not show a full log frame, i.e., with a full hierarchy of objectives (including goals/objectives higher than output level), indicators, means of verification and assumptions. This is actually closer to being an action plan. If a more complete log frame had been prepared, the assessment of impacts and effects (i.e., outcomes) would have been facilitated. [See explanatory notes about log frames below]

**ANNEX: Project Logical Framework**

**Usual log frame elements and implications for planning and monitoring**

Typical Log Frame Structure

Hierarchy of objectives	Objectively verifiable indicators (OVIs)	Means of verification (MoVs)	Assumptions
Final Goal (FG)			
Intermediate Goal (IG)			
Outputs			
Activities			

Hierarchy of objectives

Hierarchy of Objectives	Results level	What: description	Caused by Who	Claimed by Who	Time-Frame
Final Goal	Impact	Sustainable changes in human conditions or well-being of target population at household level	Target groups experience it; may come from target group or local institutions	Attribution is difficult with other influences substantial and inevitable	Sometimes measurable within life of project (e.g., through case studies) but most often ex-post
Intermediate Goal	Effect	Reactions and actions of target populations as a consequence of exposure to project interventions	Target groups experience it; comes from response of target group to project interventions	Should be largely attributable to the project, with other influences relatively minor	Within life of project
Output	Output	Products produced by the project	Project staff produce it (and are accountable)	100% attributable to the project	Within life of project
Activity	Process	Interventions or activities done by the project	Project staff do it (and are accountable)	100% attributable to the project	Within life of project
Input	Input	Resources used by the project	Project staff use them (and are accountable)	100% attributable to the project	Within life of project

[From Barton, T. (1997) How Are We Doing]

## **Selection criteria for villages in provinces**

[From Jask workshop, as supplied by CENESTA]

### **Description of Villages Selected in each Province**

#### Hormozgan Province

In the Southeast of Hormozgan Province, in Jask District, eight villages were selected to participate in the workshop. Covering a large area of the district, from the west to the east, villages chosen are named Bonji, Gangan, Baghan, Surgalm, Siromj, Gabrig, Gouhert and Lirdaf. The climate of this district is very hot, humid and windy, with an average annual rainfall of 151.2 mm, falling mostly during the winter months. In the summer months, the temperature frequently rises to above 50°C. In the north of the region, the geography is mostly mountainous, and to the south, there are sandy hills and beaches. Rivers running through the district are named Jegin, Gabrik, Sadich, Behmadi, and Jask-e Kohne.

The coastal areas of the district are rich with marine life, and all eight villages selected are active fishing communities that mainly fish shrimp. Their main problem is a general lack of facilities due to the isolation of the area. With proper technical development and investment, this deprived area could be transferred into the beneficiary of a thriving shrimp industry.

#### Kohgiluyeh-Boyer-Ahmad Province

Four villages from Kohgiluyeh-Boyer Ahmad Province were selected for participation in the workshop. The Moshemi Sofla village is located in the mountainous Zilaie Area, and its inhabitants, who work in agroforestry and rear livestock, are completely isolated from the nearby Yasuj City. The Bar Aftab village is located in the Dehdasht District, and unlike Moshemi Sofla, can be accessed by the cities, which has led many young men to give up agricultural activities for other income-generating activities in nearby cities. Other participants were chosen from the group of nomads who migrate between the Dasht-e Roum in Amir Abad and the Dasht-e Mourd in Poshtkuh-e Basht.

This province contains a section of the Zagros chain of mountains, and nomads migrate to these cooler highlands during the summer to then return to the lowlands for winter. About 30% of the province is wooded, there are 1,300,000 hectares of rangelands, and there are also several powerful rivers running through the province, although only about 5% of their power-generating capacity is currently being used.

Livestock used to be the main source of income for the people of the province, although now many nomads are taking up agricultural activities as well. The presence of rainfed agricultural lands, orchards, and crops of wheat, barley and rice, as well as other income-generating activities including fish breeding and bee keeping, mean that this area has a great potential to benefit greatly from this project that will develop further this wealth of resources that already exists there.

#### Kurdistan Province

Four villages from the Marivan District of Kurdistan, in the Northwest of Sanandaj were selected for the workshop. The Kikan and Lenjabad villages are located in the Khavan Mirabad Dehestan, and Naw and Houram-e Takht are located in the Hurumanat Dehestan.

The climate of this district is cold and semi-humid, with a maximum summer temperature of +36°C, and a minimum winter temperature of -25°C. The average rainfall is 750mm. The district consists mainly of a large fertile plain, and the primary crops grown there are wheat and barley. Villagers living in Kikan and Lenjabad have easy access to Marivan City, and thus many young men leave their villages to work there, leaving those few who remain to work on the rain-fed agricultural lands. Subsequently, crops are often now adequately attended to, and an insufficient amount of food is stored for the winter months when villages are cut off by snow. In the Hurumanat Dehestan, there are rich orchards, and villagers also generate income from various local handicrafts, such as the producing of the *giveh* shoe. Research has shown that if the production of such handicrafts were further exploited, villagers could create a successful and profitable industry.

## Project time line

Date	Event
May 1997	First idea was submitted by CENESTA to UNICEF on basic needs of women and children
Oct 1997	Exploration grant in the amount of US\$10,000 to make field visits to identify suitable locations/areas, make 1 <sup>st</sup> contact with possible stakeholders, develop proposal and action plan
Winter 1998	First draft of proposal submitted by CENESTA, discussions begin with UNICEF on particulars of the project
Jun 1998	CENESTA holds first PRA training for project staff and provincial co-ordinators. Persian language PRA materials prepared.
Jul 1998	First project progress report by CENESTA, based on findings of exploration grant
Aug 1998	Project proposal agreed between CENESTA and UNICEF. Project's first official field visit.
Sep-Nov 1998	Series of trips to the three project provinces; pilot sites selected with assistance of MoH and local government. Communities selected, community meetings held and facilitation of preliminary community assessment, develop criteria for selecting animators and then selection by communities. CENESTA conducted preparatory workshops with animators
Nov-Dec 1998	Jask workshop for three weeks – train community animators on PRA methods, baseline, planning
Dec 1998	Report on Jask workshop
Dec 1998-Feb 1999	Community animators hold community workshops applying new methods. CENESTA team members make field visits to support animators
Feb 1999	Two guidebooks produced to help in collecting baseline data: a) guidelines for community animators; b) guidelines for provincial facilitators
Mar 1999	10 day traveling workshop for Hormuzgan animators, provincial facilitators and project staff, plus a national expert on handicrafts. The sanduq idea was developed and further elaborated. Did post-assessment of Jask workshop, gave training to community animators on log frame; first wealth-generating projects developed by local communities and animators. Formation of community councils for protection of vulnerable groups. Training on growth charts. Developed idea of community libraries.
Apr 1999	Field visit to Kurdistan for project assessment. Developed framework for sectoral co-operation. Presentation of large-scale community-developed wealth generating activity plans to local authorities
May 1999	Field visits to Kurdistan to finalise a community project for irrigation pump, and gum harvesting. Field visit to Kohiloyeh-va Boyer Ahmad for project assessment; developed framework for sectoral collaboration, presentation of large project ideas to authorities
Jun 1999	Field visit to Jask, accompanied by UNICEF. Idea for solar ovens introduced
Jul 1999	Field visit to Jask. Participatory training workshop for animators on cholera; starting point for latrine construction in some communities. Design and construction of solar ovens commenced
Aug 1999	Solar oven prototype completed; oven usage and monitoring plan developed.
Aug-Dec 1999	Bylaws devised and written for community sanduqs and central sanduqs. First solar cooking workshop. Local communities begin grant writing proposals for small short term projects specific to the UNICEF fund. Development of five year community visions, and then short, medium and long-term plans.
Dec 1999	Early childhood workshops – UNICEF, local government and CENESTA. Final project report process begins. Progress report by community animators forwarded to UNICEF and CENESTA. Pre-production process for project video begins. Wealth generating project proposals finalized and presented to UNICEF. CENESTA begins financial reporting process for this period. Approval and registration of sanduqs in the district governor's offices. Bank accounts opened for each sanduq at the Bank of Agriculture.
Jan 2000	UNICEF transfers funds to local sanduqs and central sanduqs for small investment projects. Field visit to all project sites to support implementation. Solar cooking workshops for rural women continue.
Feb 2000	Begin compilation of data on local cultural nutrition and recipes. Evaluation mission with CENESTA, UNICEF and MoH to Jask; visited project sites to see implementation.
Mar 2000	Several support missions to Kurdistan; local government in this area becomes heavily involved with project. Local government gives grants to sanduqs.
Apr 2000	Compilation of data on local cultural nutrition and recipes completed
Apr-May 2000	Support mission for implementation of small investment project and to gather financial report from local communities for UNICEF
May 2000	Begin preparation with local communities for 'mid-term' evaluation
Jun-Aug 2000	CENESTA begins exploring and identifying mechanisms for formal acceptance of sanduqs to qualify for government credits. Final phase 1 report prepared.
Sep 2000	Mid-term evaluation mission – CENESTA, UNICEF, MoH