

Sustainable Development of Rural Areas in the Mediterranean

A discussion paper

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This discussion paper is a product of an action research programme undertaken by the Cyprus Conservation Foundation over the period 1999 to 2002, with funding from the European Commission under the LIFE Programme.

This action research programme was focused upon three study areas in the eastern Mediterranean :

- the River Valleys area , in south west Cyprus
- the Sitia region, in the eastern part of the island of Crete (Greece)
- the region of Stavropouli in Thrace (Greece).

Although these three areas form only a small sample of rural areas in the Mediterranean, they offer provocative ideas which may be of interest to a much wider audience. The countries of the Mediterranean share many characteristics which crucially affect the potential for – and indeed the need for – sustainable development in their rural areas.

We therefore offer this discussion paper as a contribution to the growing debate about the development of rural areas in the Mediterranean. It is addressed to governments at all levels; to people in the private and non-government sectors who are concerned with rural development; and to the people who live (or might wish to live) in rural areas.

The paper has been prepared by Mr Costas Apostolides and Professor Michael Dower, who have acted as consultants to the River Valleys Project in south-west Cyprus. They have drawn upon the studies in Cyprus, Sitia and Stavropouli, and upon wider thinking about rural development in Europe and specifically in the Mediterranean.

We will welcome reaction to this discussion paper, and hope that it may lead to cooperation with others who are concerned with the well-being of the heritage and the people of rural areas around the Mediterranean

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1. Introduction

1.1. The character of mediterranean rural regions The rural regions which lie along and behind the coasts of the Mediterranean vary very greatly in their geomorphology, climate, state of economic development, human culture and other factors. However, very many of them display common characteristics of environmental fragility (for a variety of reasons), weak and narrowly- based economies, fragile social structures(e.g. marked by out-migration and ageing) and relative weakness or conservatism in institutional structures.

1.2. The following characteristics generally exist throughout the rural areas of the Mediterranean region:

- seasonally high temperature and low rainfall in summer, coupled with declining average annual rainfall in recent decades;
- cool to cold winters, during which most rainfall occurs;
- high productivity in irrigated agriculture, and low production in other agriculture because of low rainfall;
- groundwater reserves vulnerable to over-extraction, which can threaten aquifers, natural wetland habitats and future water supplies for human use;
- sensitive terrestrial ecosystems threatened both by declining rainfall and human interference (over-grazing, burning, agricultural intensification, building development, urban expansion, tourism and use of fertilizers and pesticides);
- thin soils, sensitive to erosion caused by intense winter rainfall, this problem being greatly exacerbated where vegetation cover is destroyed by fire or grazing;
- increasing risk of fire in marginal agricultural areas and surrounding vegetation, due to abandonment of lower quality cultivated land and accumulation of dry combustible material;
- rural economies based on small agricultural holdings, low intensity farming and small manufacturing companies which are often unable to compete with new production methods adopted in larger more developed economies;
- great dependence on tourism activity, which however can degrade the environment;
- communities based on nucleated villages with strong family and social ties;
- depopulation of rural areas, combined with rapid growth of urban centres, especially those in coastal locations, as well as urban sprawl;
- sensitive to environmental change due to semi-arid conditions.

1.3. In addition to the above, there is a history of migration to urban centres and foreign countries owing to the lack of opportunities for employment in the home country. For example, Cyprus has very large communities of expatriates in the UK, Australia, Canada and Africa : Greece has many expatriates in Australia,

Germany, Canada and the United States. The experience in Cyprus is that such migration constitutes a loss for the rural areas, but has usually been seen in a positive light because of the consequent transfer of money, investments, technical advice and influence of the migrants. Similar patterns exist for Italy and the Balkans. There is also an emerging pattern of migration to Europe from North Africa and the Middle East.

1.4. Over the last 20 years, however, Cyprus has experienced net immigration, largely due to the return of former migrants (here referred to as expatriates). These expatriates are an important resource for rural communities whether they return home and resettle, live abroad or in urban centres, because a significant proportion still care about their home village and often maintain property there, and because they are a source of new ideas, vitality and funding for rural areas. They are also a source of population since with affluence and retirement many do return to invest in property or rehabilitation of family homes, set up development associations and provide support to their home village. In addition they also form a sort of dedicated tourist market since many return frequently to their home villages for vacations and visits.

1.5. Rural population has, however, continued to decline in Cyprus, owing to the movement of younger people to the towns in search of better employment opportunities and a modern lifestyle. This group also forms a resource for rural areas in a similar way as the overseas ex-patriots, though they have the possibility of more frequent visits and contacts with their home village. In the Valleys the population of the villages is substantially increased during weekends and holidays, especially during the summer vacations.

1.6. One further group that provides potential for development of rural areas is the foreign residents, mainly from Western European countries, but also from the Middle East and more recently Eastern Europe. Some of this foreign element have holiday homes and live in the villages from time to time on extended holidays, some are retired people seeking sunshine and lower living costs, but others are professionals working for overseas companies in the broader region. These overseas residents of rural areas are significant in Cyprus, Greece, Portugal, France, Italy and Spain. There are indications that the tendency is spreading in other Mediterranean countries, though at present it may be concentrated in the towns and tourist development areas.

1.7. A further characteristic of most of the Mediterranean is the traditional nucleated village and the strong organization of communities. This and the Ottoman system of the Muktar, or village president, prominent in the Balkans, Turkey, the Middle East and North Africa, provides an institutional basis for building programmes for sustainable development.

1.8. The traditional institutional systems are not sufficient in developing the right momentum for change and development, partly because the local authorities

tend to be conservative and are used to operating within the bureaucratic mechanisms of government. In general they are concerned to keep taxation levels in the villages at low levels and consequently follow a policy of maintenance of local infrastructure and basic services, and in general they are dependent on Government for investment in infrastructure and other development.

1.9. The approach to sustainable rural development presented in this paper does not attempt to ignore government, or traditional institutions, but to invigorate the rural development effort by harnessing fully the public sector potential, and supplementing such efforts through self-help activities. This requires increased involvement of the public sector in rural development but reduced dependence upon the state through the active involvement and organization of the local population, expatriates NGO's and professionals in development. A key element is to revitalize the communities, and awaken them to the multitude of opportunities that are available today, and combine this with good management, coordination and guidance. The approach may be seen as one of "Reduced Government Dependence-Self help" development .

1.10. **Rising interest in rural development.** In many of the countries which border the Mediterranean, there is rising public and political concern about the well-being of the rural regions. This concern is prompted by a variety of factors – the social fragility of the rural communities themselves; the impact of rural out-migration upon the cities to which the rural people go; the reaction within Europe to the growing flow of migrants the rural parts of the countries north Africa and the Middle East; the decline in employment and income upon farms; and the expected effects upon the farming community of the programme of reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and the forthcoming round of World trade talks

1.11. At a policy level, this concern is expressed within Europe in the shift towards rural development in the allocation of EU funds, reflected both within the EU and the countries being considered for future membership of the Union. Thus much of the northern Mediterranean is moving – under the influence of the Rural Development Regulation within the EU, the EU's SAPARD programme and related government-funded programmes in Slovenia; and the Stability Pact and related instruments in the Balkans – towards a structured governmental interest in rural development programmes. *(Is there any impetus in the same direction among the states of the southern Mediterranean, prompted - for example - by the Organisation for African Unity, the United Nations, or EU aid and trade programmes ?)*

1.12. However, very few Mediterranean countries have any well-developed pattern of rural development programmes. The absence of such programmes is a result of various factors – the preoccupation of some governments with urban, rather than rural, development; a tendency to focus governmental effort upon

sectors (such as agriculture, or industry, or environment) rather than upon territorial units; a relative weakness of institutions in many rural regions; and a lack of civil-society structures and of social dynamism among rural communities.

1.13. These factors all imply that many rural areas on the Mediterranean seaboard may need deliberate programmes of rural development for the very first time. The challenge to governments and peoples is to find a way to 'kick-start' such programmes, in a way that will ensure that these programmes are truly sustainable.

1.14. This discussion paper outlines an approach which – with appropriate variation – might be applied in any rural area. This includes :

- the **concept** of sustainable rural development (section 2)
- the possible **elements** of a rural development programme (section 3)
- the **process** of preparing and implementing a programme (section 4)
- **resources** which may be used to pursue a programme (section 5).

1. The concept of sustainable rural development

2.1. This section offers a brief outline of a conceptual approach to sustainable rural development.

2.2. **Rural Development.** There have been many definitions of rural development. The following is one of the most useful :

Rural Development is a deliberate process of sustained and sustainable economic, social, political, cultural and environmental change, designed to improve the quality of life of the local population of a rural region.

2.3. The key points in this definition are:

- the emphasis on a deliberate and sustained **process** : rural development is not a short-life affair : it needs to be pursued over a long period of years and in a deliberate way.
- the inclusion of **sustainability** : see further comment below.
- the five other adjectives – economic, social, cultural, political and environmental – which show the width of the subject and the need to keep and take an **integrated** view (see further comment below) : the word 'political' is included not in the sense of party politics, but because any effective rural development involves a growth of public awareness and confidence at local level and hence a subtle change in power relationships.
- The word **change** : rural development is not about protecting the status quo : it is about deliberate change in order to make things better.
- The focus on **improving the life of the local population**. Too much so-called 'rural' (or 'regional') development in the past has been motivated by national needs (e.g. for electricity, water, defence, or for contribution to the national balance of payments from tourism), rather than the needs

of the rural people themselves. National needs may indeed be met in rural development, and any successful meeting of local needs will contribute indirectly to national well-being. But the modern concept of rural development has a prime emphasis on the needs of the local population.

2.4. Integrated rural development. In both the developed and the developing world, there has been a growing emphasis on the need for an integrated approach to rural development. What does this mean? It indicates four things:

- the focus should be on society and economy and environment;
- the development should be both “top-down” and “bottom-up” : it should embrace the policies, money and support of government (at all levels) and the energy, resources, and commitment of the people;
- it should involve all sectors - public, private and voluntary;
- it should be based on partnership and collaboration.

2.5. Four ‘legs’ or ‘pillars’ of rural development. To illustrate and dramatise the idea of an integrated approach, we offer the concept of four legs or pillars of rural development, which - like the legs of a horse, or the pillars of a building - need to be kept in balance with each other. The legs or pillars are:

- The people, with their skills;
- The economy;
- The environment; and
- Ideas, institutions and power structures.

2.6. Community-based development. Rural development should be based on the interests, and the involvement, of the community living in the area. By ‘community’, we mean all the people living in a given rural area. They are the basis for sustainable rural development because:

- they know best what are their problems and needs;
 - they control many of the resources - land, buildings, local products - upon which development is based;
 - their skills, traditions, knowledge and energy are the main resource for development;
 - their commitment is vital (if they do not support an initiative, it will die).
- Moreover, the more lively and active a community is, the more likely it is to attract people to move into the area, and to keep people from moving away.

2.7. Sustainable development. All public bodies, and many private companies, are now applying the word ‘sustainable’ to their programmes or products. What they mean by the word is not always clear. We need to be as clear as possible if we use it about rural development. It is not sufficient to refer to the famous Brundtland definition of 1987, that sustainable development is:

Development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

because that definition provides no basis for assessing whether a particular programme or project is truly sustainable. We need a definition which assists such assessment, and which reflects the emphasis (above) on an integrated and community-based approach. The next paragraph offers such a definition.

2.8. Sustainability in rural development, including rural tourism.

Sustainability is not simply a matter of respect for the environment. It relates to all four of the 'legs' or 'pillars' of rural development - people, economy, environment and institutions.

People. To be sustainable, development must promote :

- Democracy and security;
- Fairness, or equity, including special help for the poor and a concern for women, children and ethnic minorities;
- Quality of life for all the people;
- Leadership by the people, in partnership with government; and
- Respect for the memory of ancestors, and for the rights of people not yet born.

Economy. To be sustainable, development must:

- Help to strengthen and diversify the economy of rural areas;
- Ensure that local people gain substantial benefit from the local activity;
- Look to the long-term prosperity of rural areas, rather than simply their short-term benefit; and
- Avoid harmful side-effects elsewhere in the national, regional or local economy.

Environment. To be sustainable, development must:

- Respect natural systems and the integrity of the environment;
- Minimise the use of non-renewable resources;
- Consume renewable resources no faster than nature can renew them;
- Make efficient use of all resources used; and
- Avoid causing pollution and other adverse impacts on the environment.

Institutions. To be sustainable, development must:

- Be within the capacity of human institutions to control and manage, in a way that meets the other criteria stated above; and
- Not be the source of unsupportable costs in the future.

2.9. The concept of sustainable development appropriate to the rural areas of the Mediterranean is one that ensures that the welfare of future generations is not compromised by the actions of the present population, and is based on the following principles :

- Environmental and Ecological Sustainability
- Economic Development

- Social Justice
- Local empowerment

The emphasis should be on achieving an appropriate balance between these four principles : but, where choices have to be made, environmental sustainability must have priority. In this respect, it must be emphasized that the most fundamental comparative advantage of rural areas lies in their natural beauty and the contrast from city life.

2.10. In the Mediterranean, two other aspects require attention within this overall context. One is the need to maintain the population so as to preserve the tradition of community : the other is the importance of the cultural heritage.

2.11. The Mediterranean was the birthplace of civilization and as such is remarkably rich in terms of the cultural heritage, while the character and style of its nucleated villages and towns, gives a quality and variety to life. Associated with the concept of community is also the living heritage, that is the traditional skills, the food, the textiles, the festivals and other features of life that add colour and variety.

2.12. These features, whether natural or traditional, constitute the major assets of the rural regions in respect to their sustainable development. This is because they offer the added colour and experience of the discerning visitor, interested in environmental, cultural and other activities, often categorized as special interest tourism. The Mediterranean is already the world's most significant tourist region. Its rural areas can use the environment and cultural tradition as major factors to stimulate appropriate tourism, thereby promoting sustainable development and providing hope that the population can be maintained at viable levels of activity and acceptable social conditions.

2.13. The "Reduced Government Dependence-Self Help" approach to sustainable rural development in the Mediterranean, advocated in this discussion paper, is based the organization and motivation of the local population to attain leadership with respect to plans for their region, with the assistance of NGO's and professionals. Essentially the concept involves the stakeholders in taking their future into their own hands and forming the catalyst for change and sustainable development. The key element is that leadership is taken by the stakeholders, those who are primarily involved and concerned.

2.14. This does not mean less government involvement but in fact more participation by the state and public bodies in a process of partnership. The difference is that the stimulation should come from outside the public system, and that the approach should be comprehensive. In order to achieve this, the stakeholders should be highly motivated, well organized, guided by well thought out proposals, willing to invest in their future themselves and with strong popular support. In short those who are most interested, the local population and other stakeholders, are called upon to determine their own destiny.

2.15. It must be emphasised that good preparation, self-motivation and self-help are factors that are generally applauded and arouse interest and support from all sectors including the Government, local authorities, NGO's, the private sector and most importantly the people of the rural regions themselves. Good preparation and appropriate promotion, stimulate interest and make action by others easier because much of the work has already been undertaken by the stakeholders and their associates.

2.16. One problem in government is that rural development in its comprehensive form involving the environment, agriculture, industry and processing, tourism and other services, infrastructure, social services such as health and education, settlements, cultural heritage and other issue are usually spread out through out the government machinery, often including also state organizations for tourism promotion and other matters. If a group of regional representatives visit one Ministry, say the Ministry of Interior, to promote sustainable rural development in their region without a well prepared Study and Action Plan, the response is likely to be stifled because many activities will be outside the jurisdiction of the Ministry visited, and at best the Ministry will promise to study the issue. Proper study of rural development issues is a time-consuming task and the Ministry is more likely to pigeon-hole the request, send it for comments to other Ministries, or reply one some of the specific issues within its jurisdiction. At best either some limited schemes may be furthered or government as a whole decides to put together a comprehensive rural development project, a process that will take many years and may or may not reach the stage of implementation.

2.17. A well prepared Project Document combined with a strategy for promotion, and with a substantial self-help element speeds up the process, and enables action to take place on a broad front because it makes it easier for the Ministries and other organizations to identify what is required from them and to respond. If one organization fails to take up a proposal within its jurisdiction in its jurisdiction then all is not lost because other state agencies may respond more positively with regard to their components. With good preparation most agencies should respond positively although amendments may be necessary both with respect to budget allocations and detailed design of proposals.

3. Possible elements of a rural development programme

3.9. There is **no standard model** of a rural development programme. Each programme should be related to the specific character and needs of the area to which it relates. This section should be seen as a check-list which may be helpful to those who are thinking about the preparation of a rural development programme. It may contain things which are relevant, and others which are not relevant, to the particular area.

3.2. Geographic scope. At a very early stage, a decision should be made about the geographic area to be covered by a rural development programme. As implied at paragraph 2....., it is good to choose an area which is clearly recognised by the people who live in it; which is small enough for them to feel some loyalty to it; but which is large enough to offer the space and resources which are required in order to tackle the needs of the area. For example, many rural areas depend upon sub-regional services, such as secondary schools or hospitals, which are normally located in a town, so it can make sense to include the town and its rural hinterland in the same area for the purpose of preparing the programme.

3.3. Aim. It is essential to state a clear aim, which the programme will be designed to achieve. The aim will depend upon the circumstances in the area. The aims stated in the rural development programmes for the three study areas which were the starting point of this discussion paper were as follows ;

- River Valleys, Cyprus
to promote the social and economic and environmental well-being of the Valleys and the people who live in them.
- Sitia, Crete
- Stavropouli, Thrace

3.4. Objectives. The aim forms the basis for stating objectives, which are practical outputs that the programme will be designed to produce. The objectives should relate to the specific needs and priorities of the area. The objectives stated in the strategy for the River Valleys in Cyprus are :

- *to halt, and in due course reverse, the decline in the population*
- *to create a sense of identity in the Valleys, and to build up the courage and the capacity of the local people to take initiative*
- *to protect and enhance the settlements and buildings, as a contribution to the quality of local life and as an attraction to visitors and new residents*
- *to enhance social services and infrastructure, and in other ways to improve the social and economic welfare of the people*
- *to strengthen and diversify the economy of the Valleys*
- *to protect, manage and enhance the landscape and the natural and cultural heritage of the area, for their own sake and as a main element of promoting the area to outsiders*
- *to sustain agriculture as a vital element in the local economy, as a source of materials for adding value and as a steward of the area's natural environment*
- *to promote appropriate forms of tourism, as a complement to the existing economy.*

3.5. Subject scope. As stated at paragraphs 2....., a rural development programme should be integrated and sustainable. Therefore, it should relate to people and economy and environment. These three broad aspects cross-relate to each other in complex ways : but it can be helpful, when considering the scope

of a rural development programme, to consider them separately, particularly at the survey stage.

3.6. **People.** *To be completed*

3.7. **Economy.** *To be completed*

3.8. **Environment.** Environment is a broad term, embracing the land, air and water which underlie or surround a rural area; the vegetation and wildlife which live there; the 'built' environment of towns, villages, farms and other buildings; and the physical resources which arise from all of these. This environment is, so to speak, the essential platform upon which today's generation lives and from which they draw their air, water, shelter and other essentials. But it is also the place where previous generations lived, and it may contain the heritage of buildings and other structures which they left and the evidence of their culture and way of life. It is also the home of species other than man, often including a wealth of flora and fauna which may be both a delight and a resource to mankind and which have their own right to exist and to thrive.

The process of preparing a rural development programme

4.1. The approach proposed in this discussion paper is one of "Reduced-Government Dependence Self-help" in Sustainable Rural Development". The basic premise is that the initiation of efforts for sustainable development in rural areas cannot be left to government departments or institutions alone, or to the communities alone. This is because governments have a host of priorities, while communities lack the guidance they need to put forward comprehensive proposals. Professional assistance is required for communities and their representatives from appropriately qualified consultants, NGOs or other professionals, to enable the communities to develop detailed programmes and to further their implementation. The reasons for this are as follows:

- Government departments often do not have the human or other resources to develop comprehensive rural development programmes.
- Government departments have great difficulty in coordinating activity between departments and in creating effective cooperation with communities and NGOs.
- Government priorities may differ, so that sustained rural development becomes marginalized : small regions or small communities may be ignored or left out of government priorities.
- Government budgetary procedures have difficulty dealing with comprehensive projects involving many different ministries and budget heads under one management.
- Special institutional arrangements are often made by Government to implement rural development, but usually this is only done for very large projects with foreign funding which takes up a great deal of time and money and tend to ignore small regions.

- Communities generally lack leadership and know-how to promote sustainable development, and generally have a very limited view of their own requirements and the process of revitalization that is required for sustainability.
- Communities often fail to coordinate activities with others in the same region, and think only in terms of their own village.

4.2. The model tested in the River Valleys of Cyprus, and presented here, is one of cooperation between the Village authorities, leaders in the local communities and expatriates, with appropriately qualified NGOs. The Valleys Project began with the local leaders and the expatriates who approached the Laona Foundation, which then coordinated with them and provided the professional “back-bone” to submit proposals under the “Life” programme, link up with Sitia and Stavroupolis, organise the work of the consultants etc. This form of preparation and organisation is very difficult to do on a part-time basis, even if the expertise were available locally. It cannot, therefore, be implemented on a voluntary basis.

4.3. The key element is the interaction and cooperation between stakeholders themselves, primarily the local community and NGOs, between themselves in order to develop an agreed programme of with sustainable development in rural areas. It is essential that the communities themselves be activated, that the local expertise and resources be fully utilized, and that there should be both close cooperation and consultation. Nevertheless, without guidance communities are only likely to make limited progress in narrow areas through normal administrative channels.

4.4. The underlying principle of the model presented is self-motivation by the communities with self-help, guided by professionals with the aim of utilizing all the funds and resources available, whether from government, international assistance, the private sector, NGOs, and the communities themselves and their expatriates abroad and in the cities. Government assistance and programmes should not be ignored, in fact for many aspects they are absolutely essential (ie.g. legislation, administrative orders, highways, etc.) but they are not enough.

4.5. The project concept should be comprehensive, with all the constraints and possibilities considered, and consequently all the possible contributors or players should be comprehensively involved in project formulation, planning, financing and execution. As a result the role of the coordinator is crucial, because commitment, professionalism and capability, must be combined with an appreciation of sensitivities and an ability to coordinate.

4.6. **Methodology of Analysis and Project Preparation.** The key to a successful project is the comprehensive approach both with regard to the various stakeholders or players, and the project concept. This has to be balanced, however, by a need to be theoretically sound in the analysis and proposals, and

at the same time practical. Projects must be completed within the time constraints set, the funding available, and produce a programme capable of implementation.

4.7. A comprehensive approach is necessary in order to bring forth the potential of a region. This is determined by identification and utilization of the concepts of **sustainability** and **comparative advantage**. Often ideas on both factors exist in the community, in government, NGOs or research institutions, but research is required to bring the information together and identify the gaps and the needs. Research is an essential component of project preparation, but often it is limited by time constraints and funding limitations.

4.8. The preparation of a strategy for sustainable rural development in a specific rural area may involve the following steps.

- (1) Analysis of national policies relating to rural development or that could relate to rural development (e.g. technology).
- (2) Preliminary survey of problems, constraints, and opportunities identified by the local people, particular village administrations, local leaders, NGOs, expatriate organizations and officials at local/regional level.
- (3) Inventory of all resources, including human resources, natural resources, the environment, cultural resources, the economy, infrastructure, social services, institutions, and financial resources.
- (4) Analysis by sector as in (3) above.
- (5) SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis by resource, sector, community and region.
- (6) Identification of comparative advantage and opportunities.
- (7) Establishment of objectives and project proposals, with involvement of the communities.
- (8) Examination of the institutional arrangements for implementation, with emphasis on coordination, community involvement, involvement of local, regional and national government, including laws and regulations required.
- (9) Preparation of an agreed Action Plan.
- (10) Motivation of communities and of local, regional and central government, private sector and NGOs in support of the Action Plan.
- (11) Funding of the Action Plan based on the utilization of all resources, including own resources of the communities.
- (12) Monitoring, project conclusions and follow-up actions.

4.9. The process of sustainable rural development is never completed. It is ongoing. Those who produce a strategy or programme for an area should ensure that sustainable mechanisms are in place to implement that programme over a period of many years, to monitor its effects, and to adjust the programme in the light of that monitoring.