

# DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

ON INDIGENOUS BUILDING METHODS IN THE THIRD WORLD  
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کارگاه توسعه

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## THE SELSELEH REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

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## The Selseleh Regional Development Project S.R.D.P.

S.R.D.P. has been set up as an experimental project to investigate and put into operation alternative rural development policies. The concept of "endogenous" or internalised development which the project is dedicated to, calls for the improvement of the living conditions within the regions through active participation of the community and by the use of local resources (as far as possible). For this reason only the minimum necessary decisions and activities of the project are preconceived, leaving room for decisions to be made in the field through ongoing research and discussion with the indigenous population. Without the involvement of the communities concerned, development work will become both authoritarian and ineffective.

### Socio-Economic History of the Region

Luristan, within which the Selseleh region is situated, is a mountainous and remote province of western Iran. It's population of approximately 400,000 consists mainly of tribal agriculturalists and sheep and goat herding nomads.

Until the 1930's no sedentary villages existed in Luristan. The Lurs lived off agro pastoral activities and sold their animal products in the bazaars of the major towns (Borujerd and Khoramabad). Each tribe had a leader (Khan) who claimed leadership through heritage from his ancestors. In the socio-economic hierarchy, the position below the Khan's family was occupied by a group who owned large herds and lands. This group made up five percent of the total population. Another five percent (5%) were economically independent and owned sufficient land and sheep to ensure a satisfactory standard of living. The remaining population lacked either sufficient flocks or land or both to maintain economic independence and relied upon employment as farmers or shepherds for the upper group.

Early in 1930's the government's sedentarisation policy was enforced and large numbers of nomads were made to settle on land traditionally known to be used by the tribe for grazing. This policy, however, did not ensure an equitable division of the land between the settled population and it was the most powerful lineages that, despite fierce

competition, gained control of the best irrigated and most fertile land.

In the 1950's new roads linked the most remote villages to bazaars in the towns by a two day journey. This increased the contact with the persian plateau and brought a flow of consumer goods which helped to undermine tribal values and the nomadic lifestyle. During this period many other nomads settled voluntarily. This was partly due to death of sheep stock and partly for reasons of political and economic security.

Consequently, a novel socio-economic organisation evolved which still operates today. The "Agro-pastoral combine" forms the basis of rural Luristan's economy:

The head of the extended family, with the aid of some of his sons or brothers, farms the land which is normally sufficient to provide the family's annual consumption of wheat. At the same time, one or more of his sons, or close male relatives, are delegated to herding the sheep and carrying out the twice yearly migration from the summer pastures in the north to winter grazing grounds in the south of Luristan. This system is flexible and well suited to the needs of the population as members can be withdrawn from the nomadic camp to help with seasonal tasks in the sedentary side, and vice versa.

During the process of Land Reform the old tribal leaders, who were now settled landowners, were not absentee landlords (as in many other parts of Iran) but were alert and prepared for the forthcoming events. The Khans divided their land between their families and those in their favour. They themselves took leading positions in most institutions set up after the land reform, such as: city council, village council, co-operative chief, etc. Thus the old hierarchies have in effect remained the same even if they have taken a different appearance.

#### The Selseleh Region

This high basin, ringed by the Zagros mountains, is the field area for the first phase of the development project. It consists of a land area approximately 400km<sup>2</sup> and contains a population of 40,000 scattered

in about 250 villages. Most of this population are settled in the plains which also contain most of the fertile land in the region. The plains settlements are therefore predominantly agricultural, while the economy of the settlements in the three major valleys in the north and east of the plains is based on animal husbandry. However, as the majority do not own sufficient land or sheep or any other means of production, there exists in the region a large labour force that seasonally migrates to major cities in search of jobs.

The villages are scattered and vary in population from settlements formed of one extended family, to major villages of about 1,000 people. The town of Alashtar is the administrative centre of the region. It houses almost 6,000 people and acts as a market town. Alashtar has the only clinic and secondary school in the region.

#### Selseleh Regional Development Project (S.R.D.P.)

Education, Health and Agriculture - The integrated approach to rural development taken by the S.R.D.P. has manifested itself in activities in the fields of education, health, agriculture and physical services. The main bias of the development project is educational and the four activities mentioned above are introduced into the region through education, so that, while the immediate needs in the four fields of activity are being met, the local population are at the same time being trained in those fields. This will enable them to carry on the development work themselves without having to rely on the members of the development project.

S.R.D.P. Training of "Front Line Workers" - Ninety volunteers from the villages in the region were chosen and given a broad training in the fields of agriculture, health and education. The period of training was set at about one year, after which the Front Line workers had to return to their villages where they would work with the local people to improve the conditions of the area.

Selection Procedure - It has been proposed that the region be divided into thirty subregions, each with an approximate population of 1,200. A central village within each subregion will be chosen to act as a base

for the three Front Line Workers. Here the education group will hold classes, for both children and adults, in which basic reading and writing will be taught in courses that are geared to the lifestyle and culture of the people. The agricultural worker will be available for consultation when he or she is not visiting the villages in their sub-region to help with veterinary matters, prevention of insect attack on crops, advising on improved farming methods or ensuring that cultivators are not deprived of their rights in transactions such as sale of crops, purchasing seed, fertiliser, etc. In addition, a 120 hectare plot of good land has been donated by a village to the agricultural group where different cultivation and animal husbandry techniques are being researched in order to establish improved methods which are suited to the region. The health worker will also be based in the central village and will be provided with a surgery where she or he will carry out curative treatment. However, they are expected to spend at least fifty percent of their time in carrying out preventive measures to reduce the causes of ill health in the villages of their sub region. The final part of the Front Line Workers' training consisted of a common programme in which each group was to learn the skills of the other two groups to a level enabling any one of them to carry out, in the absence of the other two members, the basic necessary actions; for example, the teacher should be able to give preliminary treatment to a sick person in the absence of the health worker.

In addition to these functions the Front Line Workers are a further link between the development project and the people. They are being involved in most of the activities of S.R.D.P. and as well as helping in the implementation of these, discuss the programme with the communities concerned and express their views and desires to the staff of the development project.

#### S.R.D.P. Administration

The employees of the Selseleh Development Project collectively form the administrative body which deals with the day to day running of the development project, and co-ordinates its programme. The S.R.D.P. also

works closely with locally elected village and town councils and rural co-operatives. The project assisted in organising local elections. These elections were an invaluable educational experience for the local people who have traditionally been subject to oppressive rule from the elite. Most of the day to day problems facing the people of Selseleh from marriage disputes to complaints of overpricing in local shops, are brought to the attention of S.R.D.P. which involves itself in nearly all aspects of life in the region.

### S.R.D.P. Services and Physical Infrastructure

The provision of basic services and infrastructural installations such as roads, water supply, rural clinics, public baths, schools, etc., should be an integral part of all development projects. However, the most important aspect of this activity is not merely the creation of the physical structures, but the way they are created (i.e. the process), and the nature of the activities which these structures envelop (i.e. the function). As already mentioned, the implementation of all S.R.D.P. projects is regarded as an educational process and in the services section, already many local builders and craftsmen are being trained in working with improved traditional or appropriate techniques. Also a good proportion of the building projects will house the activities initiated by S.R.D.P. such as adult literacy classes and rural clinics. In addition, an important part of the task of the services section, is the creation of productive and employment generating small-scale industries, such as brick kilns.

The Road Programme - The development project has embarked on the construction of a major road which will link the Selseleh region to the city of Borujerd, the second largest city in Luristan.

Concurrently, a small-roads programme is also being implemented which will link villages to existing roads. This is a self-help road building programme. Both the major roads and small roads are constructed using low cost and labour intensive techniques as far as possible.

The Building Programme - The development project's building programme is the activity with which we are most involved. From the outset a

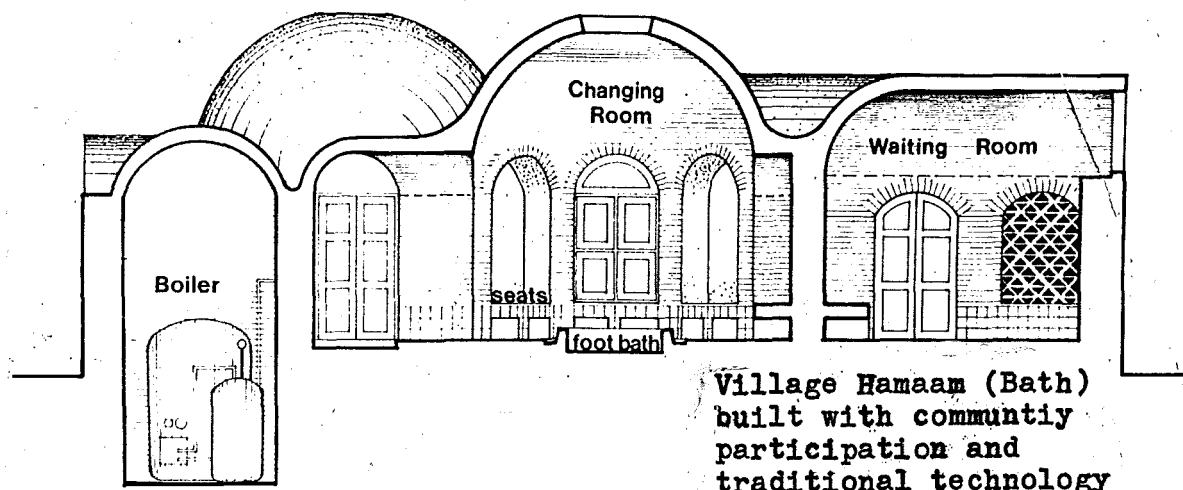
building policy for the region and how to implement it was closely integrated into practical construction activity. The policy was:

1. Research and Development of local materials and technologies.
2. Training and Education of local builders.
3. Promotion of Small-scale Building Materials Industries.
4. Building Projects that met basic needs while also acting as vehicles for the above points.

We were confronted with two types of building activity: projects financed directly by the central government and those arranged by the Sel-seleh Project.

**Government Building Projects** - These were mostly schools and housing for teachers. The buildings could only be built by officially recognised, i.e. city-based, contractors, and their standardised designs used brick, steel and cement. Thus the construction budget would largely go to city contractors and materials merchants. We pressured the official organisations through S.R.D.P. to allow us to use local builders to implement these projects. We re-designed the projects to suit the local social and climatic conditions. We used local materials and technologies and in some cases improved on these. Through the construction process we trained local builders in these techniques. In these ways we also ensured that the majority of the government budget for the projects went to the local community.

**S.R.D.P. Building Projects** - These included public baths, water-supply projects, schools and bases for the Front Line Workers in the villages. They were built in partnership with the village. The village generally requested the facility, provided the site, the unskilled labour and some of the materials while the project provided the design, the skilled labour and other materials. Designs were developed in consultation with the users. Thus the people participated in both the decision making and implementation level. A brick and lime kiln has also been constructed as a first step to regional self-reliance in building materials. The kiln will be devolved to a local co-operative once it proves economically successful.



Builders' Workshop - A two month intensive workshop has been organised through the winter when building construction ceases, to further develop the on-the-job builders' training and local technologies. The workshop includes practical work on the best ways to use mud and timber, the use of appropriate traditional technologies better developed in other parts of Iran (such as vault and dome construction), experiments into improving local technologies, plan reading, work organisation and builders' co-operatives. A literacy programme run concurrently links literacy to the builders' vocation.

Hence the services programme, like the other S.R.D.P. activities, fulfils two objectives simultaneously. It provides needed facilities while setting up the mechanisms that will enable people to provide these facilities self-reliantly.

### Conclusions and Proposals

The aim of the Selseleh Regional Development Project is to create the motivation and impetus in people to develop their region. Through the process of participation in satisfying basic needs, the population gain the skills, both technical and organisational, to fulfil needs which grow out of new and changing local conditions. Once these mechanisms are established the project can withdraw and the process will continue.

### The Barriers to Development

Yet, there are obstacles that retard and often prevent the upward mobility of the peasantry. The problems are at the local level, internal

difficulties that are a heritage of a hierarchic, unstable and an oppressed society. Land, the basic resource in rural areas, is, despite the effectiveness of the Land Reform, still unevenly distributed. The oppressive relationship between those in positions of ownership and influence to those without, still persists. Thus increased production and surplus from the land benefits the few, destroying the incentive of the majority of the rural population for raising the level of production.

There are other hindrances. Tribal, kinship, and compound family loyalties create conflicting interest groups within a village or between villages in close proximity. As a result of this, community projects have hardly ever been begun by the people themselves and potentials of co-operation, collective effort, and the pooling of resources are diminished. The instability of the recent history, together with their state of poverty, have given rise to mass insecurity. This causes an "each man for himself" situation, strengthening individuality and competition while further hampering collective activity.

Can a development project, operating in a small area, within an international socio-economic system that perpetuates these contradictions, combat them?

#### On Agriculture

Reaching a higher economic level is a common need and therefore one of the strongest motivating forces. Agriculture is still the major productive activity in rural areas, as in Luristan, and the agricultural programme of S.R.D.P. can have a substantial influence. The people's interest in diversifying their crops and investing in more long term ventures, such as fruit gardening and production of honey, is a sign of this influence. Yet without significant change in patterns of ownership and methods of production, these improvements will benefit mainly the more privileged land owners who are in a position to invest in new techniques and different varieties of production. The small, very scattered, individual plots of land which were mostly distributed through the Land Reform, are individually uneconomic. These can be collectivised into a number of larger, economically viable units and

and their owners aided to operate them as a co-operative venture.

The land in Selseleh, though fertile and possessing abundant water, is not used efficiently and its productive potential is not utilised. This is due to lack of expertise in farming, irrigation techniques, and crop diversification which results in large areas being dry farmed. Also wheat and soya beans, which are the only two major crops grown in this region, have a relatively low market value. Therefore, the income of the large landowners from their land which is usually farmed by landless sharecroppers, is much lower than the land could provide. This allows the formation of a co-operative which guarantees the landowner's present level of income as his share in the co-operative for donating the land. The land can then be farmed using improved techniques and more profitable crops and the increased income is distributed amongst the other members of the co-operative - the people who farm the land.

#### Small-scale Industries

All the landless peasants cannot be absorbed in agriculture. Alternative sources of employment have to be sought. Small-scale, labour intensive industries dispersed throughout the rural areas can be a source of employment and increased income for this section of the population. In this field the Selseleh Development Project has begun the construction of small brick and lime kilns, to be organised as co-operatives. The handicraft programme as well has a great potential for increasing the income, particularly of village women.

#### Education

Yet another way of raising the economic level of the rural population is through investment in human capital by means of facilitating education.

Increased investment in education should be simultaneously accompanied by increased productivity and employment opportunities in the villages so that the school leavers can be employed in their own regions.

In this field the Selseleh Development Project has been most active.

Education is the central theme within its policies and the training of Front Line health, education and agricultural workers, illustrates the need to approach development as an integrated, homogenous process.

### Health

Health, for example, is directly related to the economic situation of a community as well as to its level of education. Malnutrition and deficiencies of protein and essential vitamins, one of the major causes of poor health in the less developed areas, is precisely the result of the poverty that reigns in these areas. Unsanitary houses, W.C.'s, stables and polluted drinking water sources are all caused by a lack of relevant education and subsistence incomes. The peasant needs to know the sources of diseases and have the capacity to combat them.

Clearly, a combination of curative medicine and disease prevention work is required. The medical doctor and the public health engineer, though not specifically trained to combat rural health problems, are nevertheless the only professionals available in this field. Most villages however, are deprived of the services of these professionals and need to seek them in the nearest city. The training of Front Line Health Workers in both curative and preventive medicine, undertaken by the Selseleh Development Project is a major step towards better rural health. This training should equip the trainees to seek out problems independently from their teachers and to take actions towards solving these problems, rather than teaching them certain set prescriptions to simple, common diseases.

### Physical Services and Infrastructure

Services and infrastructure encourage investment in productive fields, both industrial and agricultural, thus playing a crucial role in raising the level of income that would not be possible without the existence of infrastructure such as roads, drainage, water supply, electricity, etc. The creation of such services and infrastructure however, needs capital investment which the present level of economy of most peasant communities does not allow. An initial government investment is required, which, if correctly utilised will provide the needed

services and infrastructure and trigger off economic growth.

Our task in the Selseleh region is to use the limited funds available, not only to build the maximum number of needed service installations but while building them, provide the local population with a methodology, technical and organisational skill which enables them to perpetuate the process and build for themselves. This is done through research and development in the improved use of local materials and techniques which leads to prototype building projects. In the process of building these, local builders are trained in improved traditional techniques of construction and better use of locally available materials. As a result of the practical training programme, a group of knowledgeable builders emerge, who then undertake a period of theoretical training. In this period they are taught certain design principles, how to read plans and architectural drawings and methods of work organisation, especially ways of forming building co-operatives. When the training programme is complete and the builders have formed themselves into viable groups or construction teams, greater responsibility will gradually be devolved to them. Each unit will then take charge of a certain building project and, under supervision, carry it to completion. Every project will be allocated a certain budget, which will be given to the construction units during the process of building, and they will divide this sum through their co-operative organisation. Thus the region will possess organised teams of builders who are capable of directly undertaking government contracts, and by using materials that are available locally, making the region self-reliant in building terms.

#### Conclusions

The establishment of a methodology with which the S.R.D.P. approach can be applied to other regions would be an invaluable result of this project. To provide this methodology, the members of the Luristan Project need to carefully assess their past achievements and propose a plan of action for the future based on this appraisal. This planning process would also be extremely useful to the Selseleh Develop-

ment Project itself. Lack of long term planning can lead to piecemeal activities and make co-ordination between different tasks extremely difficult.

Such a planning process needs extensive research but is essential in perpetuating an internalised development process. The field area could be divided into sub regions of a suitable magnitude. The institutions responsible for economic activity (agriculture and industry, education, health, and physical services) could be based in each sub region. The Front Line Workers trained by S.R.D.P. in agriculture, education, health and building can already form the core of these bodies. What is lacking, however, is an administrative section which would deal with legal and institutional matters not covered by the Front Line Workers.

The members of the economic, educational, health services and administrative organisations could form a council, which would have the collective responsibility of distributing development funds in areas of greatest need and organising the implementation of projects to meet those needs; organising and assisting co-operative agricultural, industrial and commercial ventures and facilitating the sale of their produce. In short, these councils will gain increasing responsibility until they can carry out all the activities of the development project and finally replace it.

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