

Success and Best Practices Assessment of the Tibet Plateau Development Program (TPDP)



(1. Bridge building in Baima Snow Mountain Nature Reserve; 2. Black pottery project in Nixi; 3. Culture conservation project: learning traditional Tibetan dance in Yunnan; 4. Community communication meeting for grassland management project in Hongyuan, Sichuan)

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Note: Translated from Chinese to English by non-native English speakers; allowances for awkward phrasing and vocabulary should be made.

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Executive summary

This report is a summary of the success and best practice of The Mountain Institute's Tibet Plateau Development Program (TPDP) conducted from August 1, 2009 through November 2009 by Jerry Chen, an independent consultant working in the field of conservation, organization management and tourism. The purpose of this analysis is to capture successes/best practices relating to TMI's strategy development, management techniques, collaboration mechanisms, community participation, knowledge sharing and learning, and knowledge capture and storage. The methods for conducting the survey, included: knowledge audits, social network analyses, outcome mapping, and stories. The findings are summarized in this report.

1. Introduction

Since December 2006 the Mountain Institute (TMI) has implemented the Tibetan Plateau Development Program (TPDP) in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan Province and in Hongyuan County, Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan Province under a grant from USAID, with supplementary donors. The program's overall goal is to "strengthen the community's capacity for meeting their socio-economic needs while conserving the environment and preserving their cultural heritage". The three main objectives of TPDP were:

- (1) To improve livelihoods by building capacity of targeted communities and enterprises to plan, implement and monitor development activities;
- (2) To improve environmental conservation and natural resource management of the rangeland;
- (3) To increase the capacity of Tibetans to preserve their unique cultural heritage;

Jerry Chen was commissioned by TMI as a consultant to analyze the program, capture success and determine the extent of knowledge sharing and learning. The field surveys and interviews were conducted from August 1 through November, 2009. This report will summarize the findings, observations and recommendations for TPDP for TMI's future work in China.

2. The Objectives and Methodologies

2.1 Objective

After consultation with TMI, the following objectives were agreed upon:

- Interview staff, review relevant TPDP project documents, project activities, and impacts;
- Capture successes/best practices developed under the project relating to TMI's strategy development, management techniques, collaboration mechanisms, community participation, knowledge sharing and learning, knowledge capture and storage; and
- In cooperation with field staff and senior management, generate a final report which integrates the above mentioned success/best practices elements in order to maximize learning for TMI and its stakeholders from the program's experience.

2.2 Working procedures and methods

(1) Evaluation Procedures

According to the agreement with TMI, the evaluation was conducted using the following procedures:

- Design the work plan for this report working with TMI staff;
- Review relevant documents of administration: projects reports, work plans, and other administrative documents;
- Interview TMI staff and partners to obtain their evaluation;
- Carry out field surveys at project sites, interview staff and local partners on their perceptions and assessment of TMI's knowledge and learning;
- Analyze the collected information and findings collected from staff and partners

(2) Methods applied

The following methods were applied for information collection and evaluation:

- Face to face interviews, email and telephone interviews and group meeting interviews to collect information.
- Tools for knowledge and learning were applied in the process of interviewing and evaluation which included knowledge audit, social network analysis, outcome mapping, force field analysis, stories etc.

3. Success and Best Practices of TPDP

TMI started work in China in 1988 and initiated TPDP projects in Sichuan, Yunnan and Qinghai in 2007. After several years of work, TPDP has made significant progress and met with success: it established wide and good partnerships with local governments, communities, other NGOs and local enterprises; it conducted several projects on grassland conservation, community based enterprises development, natural resources protection, ecotourism, cultural heritage preservation, and benefited thousands of Tibetan people with impacts on the social, economic and ecological aspects of their lives. The success of the program is due to right and realistic strategies, efficient management, good collaboration among the team and with partners, knowledge sharing and stakeholders participation. On the bases of working with TMI as a long term partner, interviewing TMI staff and partners, surveying stakeholders in the TPDP project sites, and collecting documents, this report analyzes the reason for TPDPs success.

3.1 Challenges to initiate TPDP

The challenges were significant when TMI initiated TPDP in Sichuan and Yunnan:

- Rich biodiversity and natural resources in these areas are unique and play an important role in the conservation in the world. The fast economic development has had crucial impacts on the biodiversity conservation. How to balance the economic development with natural resources preservation is a grave concern to government, NGOs and all people;
- Tibetan people have traditional culture which respects nature. How to preserve this traditional culture and integrate it with biodiversity conservation is one of the keys for success;
- Poverty is one of biggest challenges to local governments and communities;
- There have been many international and domestic NGOs working in China for a long time at TPDP project sites. Many of them are famous international NGOs with strong financial, technical and human resources support from their headquarters, such as CI, WWF and TNC. These organizations have set up local partnerships, developed strategies and conducted activities. They also obtained experiences and lessons from their practices. As a relatively small NGO and latecomer to project sites implemented under this project, TMI needed to find a unique and helpful role. Further, the complicated political situation in these areas has had direct impact on project implementation and

success.

3.2 Staff and Partners' View on Success

During the interviews and survey, all staff and partners were proud of the work TPDP has done in the project sites. They listed the major success and best practices of TPDP as:

- a. All projects were recognized by local government and partners as successful ones
- b. In a few years, as a small international NGO working in relatively unfamiliar places in Sichuan and Yunnan, TPDP designed new programs on natural resources protection, community sustainable development and cultural heritage preservation. These new programs not only benefitted local communities, conservation, social and economic development of Tibetan area, but also established long term collaborations and knowledge sharing mechanisms that improved the sustainability of program.
- c. Strategies and methodologies, such as value chain and cultural heritage preservation, were applied in the project successfully, and developed so that they could be adapted to other places and projects in the future.
- d. A team was built and the capacity of staff and partners was improved through project implementation activities and knowledge sharing.

Staff and partners also evaluated the reasons for success as represented in Figure 1

Figure 1. Success Reasons Ordering by Staff and Partners

IMPORTANCE ORDER	SUCCESS REASONS
1	Good collaboration
2	Correct strategies
3	Full participation from partners
4	Trust to partners
5	Efficient communication and promotion
6	Good knowledge sharing flow

Nearly all staff and partners felt that TMI has very good collaboration mechanisms and created an atmosphere that gave them enough space to contribute their knowledge and skills for the work. This mechanism and atmosphere is the basis for obtaining success.

Appropriate strategy, efficient management, full partner's participation and knowledge sharing also are important for the successful project implementation.

3.3 Captured Success and Best Practice

Based on the long term collaboration with TMI, interviews and surveys with TPDP staff and partners, review of documents and analysis of all information, the success and best practice of TPDP captured by the writer are listed below:

3.3.1 Determine right niche and role in project sites and developed correct and realistic strategies

TMI is not a new international NGO in China but a newcomer to new region compared with other NGOs. The following comparison with other organizations in the table below shows that at the inception of the project, TMI was not in such a competitive position to play a significant role in Diqing Prefecture. How to promote TMI's strengths and to develop correct and realistic strategies became a big challenge to TPDP team.

Figure 3.1 Comparison of TMI with WWF and TNC in Diqing Prefecture in 2007

	TMI	WWF	TNC	
Work years in this region	New comer	More than 10 years	More than 9 years	
Staff/Office	none	One in Shangri-La	One in Shangri-La, one in Deqin	
Finance	TPDP project	Strong and diverse	Strong and diverse	
Projects	none	Ecotourism, grassland conservation, environmental education	National park, alternative energy, green building, micro credit, environmental education, ecotourism, poverty alleviation, Golden money conservation	
Relations with government and partners	none	Prefecture and country government, communities,	Prefecture, county government, natural	

		nature reserves	reserves, national parks	
Project sites	none	Hamagu, Napa lake, Deqin	Shangri-La Gorge, Potatso, Meili Snow Mountain, Baima Snow Mountain	

3.2 Project Progress

The following table shows the progress of TMI's projects by the end of 2009.

Project	Location	Progress	Project status in the end of 2009
Nixi Black Pottery	Yunnan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved community artisans skills and capacity through training 2. New products produced and market were established 3. Promoted new black pottery through publication of brochures and exhibition 4. Set up cooperation network with partners 5. Black pottery became one of famous tourism products in local market and people's income has been improved 	completed
Village-based tourism development	Yunnan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Local communities capacity have been approved through training 2. Network and cooperate relationship has been established 3. Community-based ecotourism activities initiated 4. Enhanced biodiversity knowledge for local guide 	completed
Community-based grassland co-management	Yunnan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduced degradation of grassland and threats to grasslands 2. Improved cattle's productivity 3. Set up direct partnership between communities and partners 4. Replicated the model in other project neighboring communities; 	completed
Participatory community watershed management	Yunnan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Constructed water supply system for communities 2. Reduced threats to water ecosystem through installation of solar heater system, tree planting, 3. Developed watershed project 	completed

		<p>plan with communities and partners to provide basis for long term watershed protection and management</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened community management skill by developing watershed management regulation and set up community committee 	
Culture conservation	Yunnan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Treasure of Buddhism scriptures, traditional books are conserved Traditional dances were recorded, distributed to students by training and dance festival Prayer stones and historical stones were copied, stored and protected Exhibition room was built to protect traditional masks Visual materials were made and stored to protect culture heritage 	completed
Integrated Yak products development	Sichuan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> New market is developed through market investigation and analysis, new yak products development Established partners network with government, communities, research institutions and other stakeholders 	completed
Rangeland Resource Management	Sichuan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable and environmental friendly rangeland management pattern was established which helped to increase productivity of high quality grass without damage to rangeland Increased local people's income and improved their livelihood through better rangeland management Partnership, community and stakeholders participatory mechanism has been established 	completed
Alternative Energy Development	Sichuan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Ecological alternative energy strategies and policies have been accepted and adopted through success of the project Communities life quality has been improved and women load has been reduced after installation of solar heater and alternative energy system 	completed
Woman Health Awareness	Sichuan	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity and skills of health workers from both county and local health institutions have been improved and capable to provide better services to women through training Awareness for woman health has 	completed

		been improved for hundreds of women in the project site after training	
Environmental Conservation Education	Sichuan	1. Improved local community's environmental conservation awareness through hardware construction, rangeland preservation and environmental education.	completed
Ancient Tibetan text preservation	Sichuan	1. Increased Tibetan's capacity to preserve significant culture heritage through preservation, restoration of culture sites, text, oral traditions and artifacts 2. Improved income and livelihood through training of cultural products skills and techniques training	completed
Tibetan language preservation	Sichuan	Improved preservation situation through publishing of Tibetan words book and CD-ROM	completed

TPDP applied different methods, including knowledge audits, social network analyses and other methodologies to gather information and data from stakeholders, partners and other organizations, and then looked for to gaps and opportunities for TPDP program development. The strategies developed by TMI to initiate TPDP in Diqing Prefecture were:

- Conducting s comprehensive survey and interview with stakeholders of governmental agencies, enterprises, organizations and communities to collect as much information as possible before making the decision
- Applying TMI's strengthen in enterprises development, cultural heritage preservation and natural resources management -- especially grassland conservation -- to develop the suitable implementation plan to avoid overlap with other organizations;
- Selecting appropriate sites and partners and establish a partnership net to obtain the biggest support;
- Developing realistic strategies and work plans for the project implementation.

For example, when TMI first came to Shangri-La of Yunnan to start the program, they did not start activities immediately, instead, they organized many discussions with local government, communities, tourism operators and enterprises and field surveys to audit knowledge and information about Shangri-La, analyzed social network to find

stakeholders and partners, look for the most efficient approach for program implementation. During this process, more than ten organizations including government agencies, local and foreign NGOs, enterprises and communities were involved in. Based on the survey and information gathered, TPDP developed practical strategies for the implementation of programs in Shangri-La. During the strategy development, TMI avoided biodiversity conservation but played to it's strengthen in community development, enterprises development, and traditional culture protection; where there was not much work being done by other groups, to guarantee the success of programs in Shangri-La. Another success issue for the TPDP was that the administrative and developed strategies were based on TMI's long term work experience in mountain areas and in Tibetan areas, and the program tried hard to link the strategy with goals, to encourage outside support from experts and partners, to encourage full participation from local partners and communities to develop realistic and implementable strategies.

During the process of strategy development, not only TPDP staff participated, but also stakeholders and potential partners were invited into the whole process. In this way, different opinions on project selection, partner's selection and strategy development were collected and analyzed. Government, partners and communities' needs were presented; challenges and outcomes were recognized; knowledge and technology,

Case 1: Nixi Black Pottery Project. When TMI came to Shangri-La in Yunnan to look for project site for community based enterprises development, the team held several meetings with local government and organizations to discuss the selection of the project site and content. Several field surveys for Tibetan wood bowl, agriculture, black pottery and other potential projects were organized. Finally, Nixi Black Pottery project was selected. The reasons to select this site includes communities participation, government and enterprises support, the potential benefit to communities, the combination of culture and environment protection, good demonstration etc. The team also developed right strategy to raise fund, organize implementation and initiated project. This project obtained satisfying outputs.

experts and coordinators were identified. All of these provided complete information to

decision makers and benefitted the development of appropriate strategies and work plans.

3.3.2 Efficient management to ensure project implementation

After designing strategies and programs, TPDP implemented projects in Diqing Prefecture in Yunnan Province and Hongyuan in Sichuan Province. The major success and best practice in management techniques are below:

- Different perspectives of project management were established which clearly clarified roles and duties for each group to make sure the efficient management of program.

Beijing Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programmed management • Administration • Evaluator • Leveraging funds
Field Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project management • Communication with local partners and communities • Project implementation
Beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women • Children • Men • Government agencies • Community-based enterprises
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donors • Implementing partners • Strategic partners

- Set up a relevant simple structure to reduce un-efficient management layers and costs.

The management mechanism encouraged staff to maximize their capacity and take more responsibility. In this way, each staff had enough space to apply their ability and improved efficiency of project implementation. New staff was also given opportunities to take on more tasks and responsibilities to improve their capacity. The administrative team offered strong support to the projects on human resources, finance and operations.

Case 3: Renzeng's story. Renzeng is a staff member currently responsible for cultural heritage preservation in the Shangri-La Office. She had only recently graduated from a university when she joined TPDP. She was assigned to support implementation of the cultural heritage preservation in Shangri-La. Management gave her space for her development and provided strong support from different aspects. Senior staff in Yunnan and Sichuan was assigned to be her supervisors and local experts were hired as her partners. In less than two years of work, Renzeng gained the ability and confidence to manage this project independently and she achieved significant progress in both project and herself.

Case 4: Driver in Shangri-La Office. Mr. He is a young Tibetan driver in Shangri-La Office. He worked hard and provided a safe and good service for colleagues. According to his willingness, he was encouraged to use his language and cultural advantages to participate projects. After several years, he is capable of project coordination, training, interpretation and communicating with communities. He also learned techniques for solar system installation and can provide technical support for the project as well.

- Dialogue and “learning by doing” was applied by the management. In order to face the challenge of new tasks and change of staff in the field, the staff and partners were frequently communicating with each other. In this way, new staff could learn from old staff and others and become familiar with the situation soon. TPDP also fostered a “learning by doing” atmosphere to help staff get involved in the implementation. Many local Tibetan staff was young and new, but they became the experts in new field and contribute more to projects.

- Complete document management system was established.
TPDP set up a good document system to collect and manage all project documents in the purpose of knowledge sharing, project measuring and management. TPDP established standards for reports, working papers, proposals and websites. A set of performance datasheets were designed and used for measuring the progress. Indicators for measuring the project outputs and partly the outcomes were formulated in the matrix. The existing indicators are mainly linked with and related to the outputs, few of them are for measuring the outcomes and impacts. Data and information for measuring the indicators were systematically documented and used for producing the annual progress reports. Progress reports were produced quarterly and annually to report progress, outputs and outcomes which not only help donors to understand the progress, but also helped staff in sharing knowledge, skills, experience and lessons.

3.3.3 Collaboration: The successes that staff and partners are most proud of *a. Collaboration among staff*

During the survey and interview, the most significant feature for TPDP team, which was emphasized by all staff and partner, was the good collaboration among staff, partners and communities. The program divided into different projects: Enterprise Development Program, Natural Resources Management, Culture Heritage prevention, and Grassland co-management. Each project had its own staff, objectives and tasks. Regardless of the different backgrounds, knowledge levels and skills of team member, she/he received help from others when it was needed. Each member was supportive to others and the program. This collaboration helped staff and partners to communicate with others and provide strong support for whole program. For example, through this system of collaboration and communication, the culture preservation officer would gain knowledge about natural resources project and offered some good suggestions. Nearly all staff interviewed said that TPDP group is a family which fully was supportive. TPDP provided opportunities to every staff to encourage their contribution. For example, drivers are not involving project activities in many organizations. TMI encouraged the driver to participate project coordination, training, interpretation and communication with communities. The driver in Shangri-La office took responsibility for coordination, project implementation and training for solar heating systems.

b. Collaboration with partners

TPDP staff understood that good collaboration would guarantee the project's success, and that a good local team would make the project sustainable. Therefore, to establish good collaboration with local government, communities and other partners, capacity building for partners became the common objective of each staff member. Some major principles were followed during project implementation:

- Get trust from partners by doing a professional job
- Fully respect partners
- Encourage different support including funding, policy and technical support from partners
- Encourage participation from different sides

For example, in Shangri-La, TMI staff interviewed local governmental agencies, enterprises, communities and local experts during the project implementation process to help them understand project goals, objectives and benefits to local communities, and to set up the foundation for a good relationship with partners. TPDP established good partnerships with Shangri-La County Government, Jiantang Town Government, GEI, TNC, local communities and was also supported by Swiss and German Embassies. All this support benefitted implementation of all projects in Shangri-La. TPDP also provided trainings to local partners to improve their ability and maintain the sustainability of outcomes.

Case 5: Sanna Reservoir Project: This project was a complex project that involved different government agencies and several communities, different technologies and enterprises. The TPDP team established good relations with Shangri-La County t and Jiantan Township governments which had authority to coordinate different stakeholders. Then the team worked with partners and communities to identify the appropriate and acceptable projects: a drinking water system, solar heating system and alternative energy. Stakeholders worked together to raise funds from different sources, applied new types of alternative energy systems and achieved planned objectives.

Figure 3.3.3 presents the interview results with staff and partners regarding collaboration and shows the positive result:

Figure 3.3.3 Interview result on collaboration

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Reaction from staff and partners</i>
Atmosphere and relationships	Supportive, open, expressive
Understanding and acceptance of goals	Commitment
Listening and information sharing	Rapid, direct
Attention to the way the group is working	Discussed if needed, to aid work accomplishment
Decision making	Highly supportive

3.3.4 Efficient knowledge sharing and learning

Effective knowledge and learning sharing is about two-way communication, which takes place in a simple and effective manner, and applies simple techniques to build on past experiences so as to improve activities in the future. TPDP knowledge sharing and learning is efficient, and improved the efficiency of project implementation and communication.

a. Sharing and learning mechanism

TPDP set up mechanisms for knowledge sharing and learning. The tools and approaches included regular after-action reviews and reports, quarterly reports, annually reports, review reports, irregular reports, setting up and updating websites, seminars, books, datasheets, brochures, project evaluations, discussions, and peer assistance for those wishing to benefit from their knowledge through a systematic process, to strengthened mutual learning. This sharing and learning is not limited to TPDP staff, but also distributed to partners, governmental agencies, communities and other organizations.

[Case 6: Evaluation on Winter Forage Technique Promotion Demonstration in Hongyuan County was conducted in May of 2008. This evaluation summarized techniques used in the project, evaluated the outputs which may help local communities to improve their grazing model and provided detailed information. In this way, the knowledge and techniques of forage techniques were shared with local agencies, organizations and communities.]

[Case 7: Guide on Grassland Co-management in Xiao Zhongdian of Diqing Prefecture at Yunnan Province (2007). The guide was edited in 2007 to share the knowledge of grassland co-management: why we need a co-management mechanism, how to set up co-management mechanism, how to develop a co-management work plan, and how to monitor the implementation of co-management. The guide is not only used by demonstration communities, but has also been accepted by county government agencies as a useful handbook.]

4. Conclusion

During the survey and interview with TMI staff and partners, I was told lots of stories about TPDP that gave a picture about the success and best practice of this project. After reviewing all of this information and thinking it over, my opinion about the success and best practice of TPDP can be summarized below:

4.1 TPDP clearly defined its role and developed right and realistic strategy

TPDP had good mechanisms for strategy development, which considered goals, partner's needs, the local situation, the community's practical conditions, and gaps. The process for program development included: discussion with partners and communities, field surveys, program design and consultation, and implementation and monitoring plans. The strategy was appropriate and produced good results.

4.2 TPDP set up an efficient management mechanism and used appropriate management techniques to establish a supportive, high efficient, happy and creative team