



Urban Agenda Platform

The global platform for sharing progress, action and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable urban development.

Participatory Planning in the Resettlement of Datong Town

Region

Asia and the Pacific

Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Summary

Datong Town is located on the lower reaches of the Yangtze River with a population of 3.11 million and a GDP of US\$ 2570 per capita. Its economy is primarily based on agriculture and produces AAA and BBB. For decades, the population of Datong Town has been subject to seasonal flooding causing tremendous loss to the welfare of the people and to the local economy. This led to a vicious cycle of poverty as farmers were continuously rebuilding their houses.

Background and Objective

Situation before the initiative began For the past two decades the farmers of Datong Town have been victims of regular flooding. Each year the wet season lasting 3 to 4 months would submerge vast tracts of farmland and destroy many houses. The most severely affected were households living in low-lying lands along the Yangtze River. The farmers of Datong not only suffered from economic loss but also witnessed a persistent deterioration of their living environment as they became reluctant to invest in housing and settlement improvement. This situation led the residents of Datong to petition their local government to do something to ensure their safety and the safety of their property and livelihoods. After numerous years of discussions and consultations the Datong Town Government decided in 1999 to resettle the most vulnerable residents of the town involving the construction of a new town. The plan was prepared with the full and active participation of the residents of Datong Town. Today, New Datong has become a thriving rural settlement replete with infrastructure including electricity, water supply and sanitation, schools, clinics, kindergartens and an old people's home. The resettlement scheme has also led to a more diversified economy. Establishment of Priorities The farmers of Datong participated fully in the formulation of priorities for the resettlement plan. This participatory process led to several important decisions. These included: (i) the relocation of farmers in four phases according to their degree of vulnerability; (ii) the co-financing of the resettlement with one-third of the resources coming from central and provincial government authorities and two-thirds from the farmers themselves through their rural economic development co-operative; (iii) the participation of the farmers in the actual construction of infrastructure and facilities so as to lower financial costs; (iv) to take advantage of the resettlement to plan a new town with rational land use and a complete set of infrastructure and services; and (vi) to adopt an environmentally-sound design for the new town in terms of land use, water and sanitation for the well being of its inhabitants while offering an attractive appeal for tourism. One example of the application of environmentally sound design is the use of biogas generated from agricultural waste providing a second and affordable source of energy for the residents of the town. Another example is provided by the desire of the residents of Datong to build houses and communal facilities that are inspired by traditional architecture and cultural heritage in order to maintain a sense of identity and to promote rural tourism. Formulation of objectives and strategies The overall strategy that was adopted comprised of a four-stage process of implementation. The first phase consisted of a comprehensive survey to ascertain needs and vulnerability including the economic situation of each family. The second phase consisted of finding solutions appropriate to each family, including needs, assets, willingness to pay. This included the mobilization of resources including, grants, subsidies, loans and technical assistance. The third phase was to design the resettlement taking into consideration the results of the surveys and needs assessment and to consult with the families on their preferences and options. The fourth phase consisted of establishing a project implementation framework to ensure efficient and timely completion of the project. Farmers participated widely in each and every phases, including project supervision and quality and cost control. Mobilisation of resources Financial resources: Financial resources were mobilised from three spheres of government: central government, the provincial government and the city government. In addition, the farmers of Datong participated in financing their own houses and contributed their labour to the realization of infrastructure components.

Actions and Implementation

The participatory planning process led to the establishment of a set of principles and norms for decision-making and implementation with clear assignment of roles and responsibilities. Planning was assigned to provincial and city authorities as they had the technical skills and competencies for selecting the site and providing specifications for basic infrastructure and services. However, the approval of the plans and designs and their costings was vested with the People's Congress of Datong Town. This insured that the plans and designs corresponded to the priorities of the citizens. At the same time, as citizens were involved in each stage of planning, they were able to appreciate and learn about the technical aspects of planning for basic infrastructure and services. Once the People's Congress approved the plans and designs, the planning document became a legal document as well as a guideline for implementation. Once the plan was approved, it was agreed that the allocation of land and of resources and the awarding of contracts would



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be carried out according to an open and transparent process where all documents such as contracts and terms of reference were open to public scrutiny. It was also agreed that all contractors would have to be certified and meet national standards and all project managers and supervisors be fully qualified. Quality control for civil works was assigned to a Project Quality Examination Team comprised of town government leaders, technicians, leaders of construction units and representatives of resettled households. The team worked closely with the contractors and the beneficiaries, serving a double purpose of briefing the community on technical aspects of construction and incorporating comments and suggestions of the residents into the work plan.

Outcomes and Impacts

The principle result achieved is that the people of Datong are no longer vulnerable to flooding and the loss of life, property and economic opportunity. The new town, located at XX kilometers from the flood plain of the Yangtze River provides a safe and secure environment. The relocation provided an opportunity for the citizens of Datong to improve their housing conditions. Average living area per capita (including women, children and the elderly aged) is 25.6m² compared to 11.9m² in 1998. The average household now lives in a two-story house with 80 m² of living space while better off households have built houses ranging from 130m² to 200m². All households have electricity, safe drinking water supply and sanitation which have vastly improved living conditions and environmental health. The specific needs of women, children and the elderly have all been met. The town is equipped with new kindergarten, new elementary and middle schools and a health center. A special needs center comprising of 2,400 m² of built up space has also been constructed to cater to the needs of the elderly, single parents with small children and orphans. The center employs 5 people who are physically challenged, providing them with a new and productive role in life. Last but not least, the new town has provided the population of Datong with new economic opportunities in the secondary and tertiary sectors. The economic base of Datong is much more diversified with new jobs created in the agro-industry, commerce, services and tourism. The average income of farmers per capita has increased from US\$ 217 in 1998 to US\$ 335 in 2003.

Sustainability and Scalability

Social and economic sustainability: The resettlement of Datong has allowed previously vulnerable households to enjoy a safe and secure living and working environment. They are no longer threatened by floods and are able to use their time and resources in a more productive manner. This is evidenced by the doubling of per capita income in less than five years. **Environmental sustainability:** The new town of Datong provides all of its inhabitants with basic infrastructure and services. This has contributed significantly to environmental health and to a better ecology. The use of biogas generated from agricultural waste used by 300 households and the use of proper sanitation are significant examples of how the people of Datong have improved their living conditions while respecting the principles of sustainable development.

Gender and Social Inclusivity

In 1998, during the planning and design process of the resettlement of Datong, many officials and experts conducted study tours to Qingdao City, Dalian City and Maoji City to learn from their experiences. Lessons learned from these study tours convinced the leaders of Datong to adopt an organic and comprehensive approach to resettlement, to small town development and to pay particular attention to the issues of rational land use, ecological design and environmental sanitation and health. After several years of hard work, our town is showing a new look with quality living conditions for residents and a diversified economy. It has won several awards for ecological development, land use planning and local economic development. Since winning these awards, the town's leadership has been actively engaged in receiving study tours from other towns and villages including more than 20 districts from Shanghai and Nantong. We believe that the principles of participatory planning are widely applicable in similar circumstances of small towns seeking to improve their economic development, living conditions and environment.

Innovative Initiative

The vicious cycle of poverty that often characterizes rural settlements can be broken. In the case of Datong, the principle cause of poverty and of economic stagnation resided in vulnerability to floods and the loss of economic opportunity and property. Farmers spent a disproportionate amount of their time and resources in combating the effects of floods, rather than pursuing new economic opportunities. Similarly, the local government resigned itself to a poor state of infrastructure and services. Breaking this cycle required a new vision and a radical departure from the past. The residents of Datong decided that the key to improving their livelihoods was to relocate their homes and to build an "urbanized" rural town replete with electricity, water, telecommunications, gas and sanitation. Once the decision was made to relocate the town, committed leadership and participatory planning provided the impetus for mobilizing resources and implementing the project. Participatory planning provided the citizens of Datong with a sense of ownership and responsibility. Despite being poor in comparison with people living in cities, the citizens of Datong provided over two-thirds of the financing for the project with one-third coming from provincial and central government grants. Committed leadership at the city and provincial level allowed for rapid and smooth implementation of the project, to contain costs while ensuring quality control. Their role was one of empowerment and capacity building to help the residents of Datong to better understand the technical aspects of building new infrastructure and to make better-informed choices.