

EDD response for the White Paper released by PRC on 11 July 2011

T Tibetans have sustained a harmonious balance between human beings and the natural environment. Such beliefs objectively contributed to the protection of the natural environment and ecological balance. In Tibetan history, protection of the environment was achieved by means of traditional customs, moral obligations, religious beliefs, and taboos. These unwritten routines of environmental protection were used to regulate people's behavior through conscious effort, social beliefs, and state policies. A well known example of state policy regarding wildlife conservation was the "Mountain Valley Edict" (*ri-lung tsatsik*). This edict was issued by the government every year after the New Year/ Monlam celebrations in Lhasa, and copies of it were distributed to every district throughout Tibet.

In recent years, frequent changes in the size or land use of the protected areas (*ecological conservation areas, national forest parks, geological parks, state-class scenic area and the nature reserves*) are seen to make way for local economic development projects. As for the nature reserves, the operating costs are paid by provincial or county governments making it one of the lowest ranking priorities as compared to the costs of education and health. It was also seen that, under the current arrangements of nature reserve protection, the concerned staff takes their orders from local government rather than acting on behalf of the nation, making the reserves vulnerable for the encroachers to redraw the boundaries, or change the way the land is used.

The local regulations and administrative rules as per published by the people's congress has to be implemented regardless of the offenders, whether it be an army officer shooting wildlife or a mining industry polluting water resources. Within the past two years, the international community has seen how ineffective these regulations are in practical terms. Especially in the case of mining industries, when the local residents of: [*Wu Yug Sogchen of Namling district in Shigatse (Central Tibet) in May, 2010 and Payul County, Kham (Eastern Tibet) in August, 2010*] raised their voices against these miners of polluting their water sources and grazing areas. Such incidents could be avoided should the regulations be effectively in order and operationally in place.

The latest report, 'The State of the Environment of China' citing about the clean air and water in Tibet is just another propaganda document circulated to win the hearts of the local residents and to draw in more investors. Some researchers have documented an elevated concentration of Pb, Zn, Mn, and Al in the surface water and streambed at the upper/middle part of the Gyama valley due to mining activities. The researchers have further mentioned of a great potential threat to the downstream water users due to the high content of heavy metals in the stream sediments as well as in a number of tailings with gangue and material from the ore processing sites. The recent case of polluted water entering the water supply system in Kumbum (Amdo) clearly shows how effective these regulations are when it comes to implementing them ([*see annex 1 for more details*](#)).

The increase in the state grant towards ecological and environmental protection is a positive note and might reflect the states (false) concerns to a commoner, but if we ponder a little, it clearly tells us how much the state have spent/ willing to spend in restoring the natural habitat and environment that have been destroyed (*within the span of five years 10th - 11th five year plan*) in the name of economic development.

References:

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Annex 1:

Monks and local residents of Kumbum filed a petition for environmental safety.

Kumbum, June 30, 2011:

Today, monks from the Kumbum monastery and the local residents have filed a petition to the Chinese Central Political Office and other concerned authorities regarding the rampant mining of holy passes/ mountains within the area. They also requested in their petition to stop the indiscriminate activities on the upstream rivers without any botheration for life and death of the downstream villagers, who depend solely on those rivers.

Background: *Over the past six years, within the vicinity of the Kumbum monastery, the local authorities have constructed an ore processing plant and many other mining facilities. Due to the excessive mining and resource extraction from the **Lhamo Rhi**, (a sacred mountain near the Kumbum monastery), the whole area has been spoiled, polluting the water source and turning it into a barren land. It was also reported that due to this mining activities, over the past six years more than one hundred Children's have died due to lead poisoning in the drinking water! The local residents filed numerous complaints and other initiatives to alert the miners, even the Kumbum monastery have filed a petition against these irresponsible miners but all in vain.*

According to the information posted on the website, despite the numerous petitions and complaints, the environmental situation near the Kumbum monastery has gone worse over the years. These days, the polluted water has entered the water supply system of the Kumbum monastery and eight neighboring towns. As a result many people are hospitalized consuming this contaminated water.

On the 22 June (Wednesday), monks from Kumbum monastery collected few water samples from the local water supply system and handed over the water samples to the local environmental office to check its quality. After one week, on the 29 of June, the monks were simply informed that this water is not safe for human consumption and is harmful, however they were not told about how deadly the cocktail was in terms of Chemicals, heavy metals and other pollutants.

The monks have also requested in their petition to cease the policy of economic development (exploitation of natural resources) at the cost of communal unrest and social welfare of local residents.

According to another information posted on the same website, on the 13 June, 2011, the monks have also submitted their grievance to Mr. Wang Jiao En (a senior minister at the Chinese Central Ministry for Religious Affairs) when he and 20 other ministry staff visited the Kumbum monastery.

Source: www.vot.org

Though conservation policy is centered in the establishment of protected areas, traditional Tibetan culture already contains a conscious awareness of environmental protection. In Tibetan history, protection of the environment was achieved by means of traditional customs, moral obligations, religious beliefs, and taboos. These unwritten routines of environmental protection were used to regulate people's behavior through conscious effort, social beliefs, and state policies. A well known example of state policy regarding wildlife conservation was the "Mountain Valley Edict" (*ri-lung tsatsik*). This edict was issued by the government every year after the New Year/ Monlam celebrations in Lhasa, and copies of it were distributed to every district throughout Tibet. Buddhism like other faiths proposed that human beings were an integral part of the same system as other animals. Buddhists abided by the teachings from generation to generation, which prohibited killing and advocated protection of forests and living creatures. Tibetans have always lived with nature and because of the low population density; Tibetans have sustained a harmonious balance between human beings and the natural environment. Such beliefs objectively contributed to the protection of the natural environment and ecological balance.

The natural environment has long been influenced by humans so environmental policy must address the needs of local people as well as conservation goals. Current conservation policy in China is hampered by unclear and fragmented policy regarding protected areas, lack of funding, and exclusion of local culture and knowledge in policy making decision.

Protected areas are funded by a variety of mechanisms. National reserves are funded by national ministries for infrastructure construction while provincial reserves receive funding more infrequently because they are only allocated small amounts for specific projects. Meanwhile, all reserves' operating costs are paid by provincial or county governments who usually must balance costs of education, health and other priorities with biodiversity conservation, making it often one of the lowest priorities. Due to the funding problem, Central and provincial governments encourage local governments to give priority to economic growth that rarely benefit local people rather than to sustainability and this prioritization has led to protected areas failing to meet conservation goals leads to environmental degradation (*Peng et al. 2006, Xu, Jianchu, et.al, 2007*).

A well-known example of this phenomenon is the dramatic environmental collapse in Maduo County (Qinghai Province) and its portion of the Three-River Headwaters (*Sanjiangyuan*) Nature Reserve, at the confluence of the Yellow, Changjiang, and Qiantangjiang Rivers. Prior to 1970, environmental conditions in this Tibetan county were regarded as excellent, with over 4,000 lakes and rich grasslands. In the 1980s, Maduo accrued wealth quickly through destructive gold mining and achieved the highest per capita income among all of China's animal-husbandry counties (*Ren & Wang, 2004*). By 2004, however, 90% of its lakes had dried up, in part due to overgrazing. This resulted in economic decline and Maduo becoming one of China's ten poorest counties, despite the fact that the county became part of the Three-River Headwaters (*Sanjiangyuan*) Nature Reserve in 2001. By 2007, most of the population had migrated out of the region as the area became increasingly unsuitable for human habitation due to ecological collapse (*Wang, X. 2006*).

Most of the nature reserves that are already established on the Tibetan Plateau are not well managed because, quite often, little is invested in facility construction and management and the workers are poorly trained. In Tibet, the lack of well-trained staff and the necessary framework to support them is a pressing issue. Handful of officials and staff that are in charge of conservation, few have received adequate training and lack the basic knowledge to effectively carry out conservation work. Further, often staff allocated to remote nature reserves lives with poor working conditions and low pay, with very few opportunities to enrich themselves because of the remote location. As a result, conservation goals become

even harder to meet. For an understaffed reserve, or a reserve with inadequately trained staff, poaching can be difficult to control, such as killing Tibetan antelopes in the Hoh Xil nature reserve. Tibetans are keenly aware that wildlife is not as abundant as it was one or two generations ago, largely due to indiscriminate hunting and poaching by non-Tibetans, and are keen to help implement China's wildlife protection laws. This was vividly shown in the prize-winning movie *Kekekxili: Mountain Patrol*, in which underpaid and under resourced Tibetan rangers took extraordinary risks to protect endangered antelope from slaughter by non-Tibetan poachers, putting their lives on the line.