



(UNDP/CRDP)

# Communities helping themselves

by Yoshio Matsuki

*In the aftermath of the Chernobyl accident, people living in the affected regions lost the incentives for social and economic development.*

*More than two decades on, they are now slowly taking control of their lives once again.*

It is estimated that the number of people in the Ukraine directly affected by the 1986 Chernobyl accident is about 2.6 million from a total of 2,293 settlements. These communities, which had already been broken down and resettled soon after the accident, were further affected by the restrictions on economic activities imposed on the population living in the contaminated areas. Moreover, governmental aids and subsidies, which soon became insufficient because of the impact of inflation, eventually enhanced apathy and passive behaviours in the population.

The overall impacts on the population standard of living was devastating: lack of effective medical equipments, plummeting standards in child and youth education, and rapidly deteriorating infra-

structures such as water supply and sewage systems, took their toll on the population.

Since the early 1990s, bilateral and multilateral, governmental and non-governmental support has been offered to Ukraine to cope with the Chernobyl aftermath. While at the beginning support tended to focus on humanitarian aid, the recent trend has been to focus on development.

In 2002, a report entitled "Human Consequences of the Chernobyl Nuclear Accident — A Strategy for Recovery", was jointly issued by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and completed with the support of United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA)

## Types of Projects Funded by UNDP/CRDP

Project	Number of Projects	Total Budget (US\$)	Fund Provided by the CRDP (US\$)
<b>Youth/Community Center</b>	40	681,924	278,335
<b>Improving Local Medical Clinic</b>	41	799,616	301,307
<b>Repairing Water Supply System</b>	34	612,754	213,794
<b>Repairing School</b>	34	802,574	263,896
<b>Others *</b>	41	1,046,822	347,813
<b>Total</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>3,943,691</b>	<b>1,405,147</b>

\* Repairing hospital (2), repairing kindergarten (5), repairing sewage system (2), reconstructing the market (4), establishing the Service Center (hair dressing, tailor etc.) (3), repairing gas supply system (3), Web-site project (8), cleaning water reservoir for recreation center (1), repairing cattle bleeding center (2), Sport and health recreation center (1), development of community park (1), repairing pedestrian bridge (1), repairing public bath (1), repairing children's recreation center (2), repairing street lights (1), repairing heating system for the social center (1), solid waste management (2), establishing Resource Center (1). The number in brackets shows the number of projects.

UNDP — United Nations Development Programme;  
CRDP — Chernobyl Recovery and Development Programme

Source: UNDP/CRDP

and World Health Organization (WHO). The report indicated the need for a paradigmatic shift from humanitarian aid to developmental approach. The new approach was supported by scientific observation indicating that the Chernobyl accident was a 'low-dose event' for the majority of people in the areas deemed to be contaminated, and that most people can live safely in their place of residence without any restrictions. This point was further confirmed by participants of the 2005-2006 UN Chernobyl Forum.

At the end of 2002, UNDP and the Government of Ukraine embarked on the Chernobyl Recovery and Development Programme (UNDP/CRDP), which focused on three major initiatives aimed at local populations:

- ◆ Building self-reliance and dignity;
- ◆ Creating livelihoods and economic opportunities; and
- ◆ Protecting threatened lives in contaminated zones.

The underlying strategy was community development, which foresaw not only economic development but also tackling poverty, as well as develop-

ing trust and critical thinking. One of the desired outcomes of the plan was that community members take control of their lives once again.

Additional funding for the programme was provided by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Government of Japan through the UN Human Security Trust Fund, the UN Volunteer Programme, and UN-OCHA.

UNDP/CRDP implemented community development projects in seventeen administrative districts of the four most contaminated provinces in Ukraine — Chernigivska, Rivnenska, Kyivska, and Zhytomyrska. Through these activities, UNDP/CRDP established 279 Community Organisations in 192 settlements, for a total membership of over 20,000 people.

Each Community Organization designed an action plan, which included rebuilding medical facilities, schools, water supply systems, sewage and heating systems. Subsequently, the Community Organizations applied for and received the necessary funds from UNDP/CRDP, local governments, local business entities as well as foreign governments — such as Japan's Grant Assistance for Grass-roots Human Security Projects. During 2003-2007

UNDP/CRDP financially supported 190 community projects. The total budget of community projects was over \$3.4 million, 30% of which was provided by UNDP/CRDP.

It might be argued that some of the problems facing local communities are not connected to the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. Some might even say that in other regions of Ukraine local communities faced similar problems. However, evidence shows that people who were offered voluntary resettlement, did not have the motivation to improve the social infrastructure of the communities to which they were relocated. Therefore, the rehabilitation of affected territories should be directed toward primary services such as medicine, water-supply and school systems.

The table shows the types of the projects carried out by the affected communities, and supported by the UNDP/CRDP.

### The Lystvin Village Example

Lystvin village is located 120 km west of Chernobyl, 180 km north-west of Kiev, and 40 km west of the centre of Ovruch District in Zhytomyr Province. The village is categorized as being in the third zone of radiological contamination — i.e., zone of voluntary evacuation: all those who chose to relocate were provided with a new apartment in another town.

The village population is about 1600, including 200 children. During the 1990s, the village infrastructure, which includes a school, an agricultural enterprise, a post office, a kindergarten, and a cultural centre, became deteriorated because of lack of funds. The village population also experienced increased illness and mortality rates, as well as increasing migration. Agricultural production, which was the main source of income for villagers, also declined.

In May 2003, village residents started working with UNDP/CRDP initiating the process of becoming self-organised. A Community Organisation was established, and the first project “Reconstruction of the *Bania* (sauna)” was also initiated. The project created jobs, and improved the overall sanitary and hygienic conditions of the village. This process continued with the reconstruction of the local medical clinic. The local community renovated the building while the UNDP/CRDP provided the medical equipment. A physical therapy office was also opened, thus improving medical services.

After these two pilot projects were completed, several other Community Organizations were



established in the village to carry out various projects. Under one of those projects, a Youth Centre was established by the Community Organization “Youth”. The project received the support from the local authorities. The Organization found a facility, mobilised their own resources, and applied for the grant from UNDP/CRDP. More than seventy people joined in a team renovating the building. People would be plastering, whitewashing and painting walls, installing equipment, repairing the heating and

In the Lystvin village, more than 70 people joined a project to renovate a building for a Youth Centre.

(Photo: UNDP/CRDP)



the sewage of the building. The local government, together with local sponsors, provided the necessary materials while the UNDP/CRDP provided office and sport equipments. The Youth Centre was finally opened in September 2005. It now provides learning resources, computers, typing and copying services. Lectures and training on site for a variety of jobs are also possible. The centre is equipped with a sports gym and rooms for hobbies.

## Grass Roots Humanity

**The Grant Assistance for Grass-roots Human Security Projects of Japan is a programme operated by the Embassy of Japan in Ukraine. It provides small-size financial aid (between \$20,000 and \$75,000) to non-governmental organizations and medical facilities in the regions affected by the Chernobyl accident.**

**In the period 2002-2008, the Programme contributed a total of \$717,512 to 16 projects.**

In June 2005, an Association of Community Organizations was established during a public meeting at the village. The Association's aim is to coordinate the activities of the various Community Organizations. The Association also applied for a grant from the Embassy of Japan to improve the water supply system.

Upon the request from the Lystvin Village, in June 2006 a Coordinator from the Embassy of Japan investigated the village water supply system. During the inspection, the officer found that the water supply system, built more than 30 years ago, was insufficient and had hygienic problems. Most of the people in the village were using and drinking unfiltered water containing significant traces of iron. During the inspection it became apparent that the village lacked the financial resources to repair the water supply system. Taking stock of the situation, in December 2007 the government of Japan decided to support the community's plan to improve their living condition by replacing the old water supply system. The Japanese government provided the village a grant of \$32,680 under the framework of the Grant Assistance for Grass-roots Human Security Projects of Japan. The project included repairing the water tower, replacing the street hand pumps,


as well as the water pipes, the water cleaning filters and the water pumps. The project was completed in Autumn 2008.

The Association of Community Organizations also carried out several additional projects. These included cleaning the streets and the areas flooded by the local river, renovating a monument, cleaning and renovating the water wells, cleaning a local dump, renovating the school heating system, reconstructing the local church, and renovating the cemetery. To implement those projects, the Association cooperated with local governments and donor organisations. Nowadays, Lystvyn village is regarded as a model for neighbouring villages and the region.

## Recovery and Development

Many of the people directly affected by the Chernobyl accident are still dependent on the aid coming from the Ukrainian and foreign governments as well as from international organizations.

However, in recent years they have organized themselves into Community Organizations and started rebuilding their communities, reconstructing local infrastructures such as water supply systems, schools and hospitals.

There is still much left to do to achieve a full recovery from the Chernobyl accident that took place over two decades ago. However, the people affected by that disaster have finally started building their own future and are no longer passively waiting for government aid. This is a crucial step that needs to be saluted as a major achievement for the communities affected by the most devastating accident in the history of nuclear power. 

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*Yoshio Matsuki is an independent consultant who worked as Coordinator of the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects of the Embassy of Japan in Ukraine. E-mail: yoshio03@voliacable.com*

*Dr. Pavlo V. Zamostyan, Head of the Chernobyl Recovery & Development Programme of the United Nations Development Programme in Ukraine, also contributed to this article.*