

CASE 4: CHINA

Waste to resources: community campaigns for a better environment



GRANTEE

Green River Environmental Protection Association of Sichuan



COUNTRY

China



LOCATION

Tanggulashan Township, Qinghai Province



SGP CONTRIBUTION

US\$50,000



IN-CASH CO-FINANCING

US\$11,260



IN-KIND CO-FINANCING

US\$61,575



START DATE

December 2011



END DATE

December 2013

PROJECT CONTEXT

After the opening of the Qinghai-Tibet railway in 2006 the rapid increase in tourism in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau caused a significant increase in waste generation. This threatened both the grassland ecology of the plateau and the water quality of the Yangtze River. In an investigation, conducted by the Green River Environmental Protection Association, to study waste disposal and pollution trends at the source of the Yangtze River they found that waste was primarily thrown away or burnt in the open air. Moreover, Tanggulashan Township with an administrative area of 470,000 km² had only four full-time sanitation workers which impacted the efficiency of the waste management efforts to reduce garbage pollution and POPs produced by garbage burning, the Green River Environmental Protection Association campaigns to educate local residents about environmental protection and implement separate waste collection.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

In 2012, the Water Ecological and Environmental Protection Station of the Source of Yangtze River was established by the Green River Environmental Protection Association, which promoted two campaigns designed to clean up the grasslands: "Trade Rubbish for Goods" and "Take Away One Bag of Garbage" respectively. The "Trade Rubbish for Goods" campaign was designed to provide incentives to the local communities and herdsman to collect the dispersed wastes in the pastoral region, especially non-degradable, toxic and hazardous waste, and trade it for food and daily necessities at the station. This mechanism increased the level of trust between the volunteer staff and the local community, which made collaboration smooth and changed herdsman's attitude to waste management over time. At the station, volunteers sorted the waste and packaged it for transportation to the nearby city of Golmud.

The second campaign, "Take Away One Bag of Garbage", was designed based on the station's proximity to the plateau highway, which brought a lot of tourism. The station became a natural stopping point for tourists, who then were encouraged to take with them one bag of recyclable waste from the plateau. This initiative helped set up a normalized system of waste collection and transportation out of the pastoral area of the plateau. The tourists were also educated on the ecology and vulnerability of the grasslands, which helped spread the message about environmental protection and waste management.



PHOTO: SGP CHINA

RESULTS AND SCALING UP

Tanggulashan town has seen a cleaning up of its waste, and sanitary conditions have improved. Every shop in Tanggulashan has been equipped with a small garbage bin and each street has a larger bin. By the time the project ended, more than 60,000 pieces of non-degradable waste were recycled, including plastic bottles and zip-top cans, and more than three thousand used batteries, as well as 2,000 kilograms of metal, glass, rubber and e-waste, had been recycled. Five categories of handicrafts were designed, and the station trained 40 people, including 25 women. Twenty of the female trainees who participated in the project earned a total income of ¥17,995 (about US\$2,800) during the implementation, providing the community with an alternative revenue stream.

In 2013, nearly 3,600 vehicles stopped by the protection station and over 10,000 tourists participated in the environmental protection advocacy activities. In total, more than 4,000 bags of non-degradable wastes were taken to designated disposal sites in Golmud that year. In 2015, more than 35,000 plastic bottles and metal cans, as well as about three trucks of used paperboard were recycled by the “Trade Rubbish for Goods” campaign. About 150 tonnes of waste is prevented from burning each year. Volunteers continue to come from all over the country. After returning to their own cities, they become “greens seeds” and disseminate ecological protection awareness via social media, lectures, and local media, promoting advocacy and helping to change behavior in their own communities. Eight recycling stations are slated for construction on the plateau, following the waste

collection and transportation model developed by Green River Association. It is also being replicated and promoted in Hoh Xil and in the Three Rivers Nature Reserve with support from Green River Association.

The initiative has earned many awards. In 2013, the “Trade Rubbish for Goods” project was awarded the “Water Environmental Protection Public Welfare Society Group Award” by China Guangcaishiye Foundation. In 2014, the “Ecological Protection of the Source Region of Yangtze River” has been awarded the 3rd China Charity Project Implementation Silver Award. The initiative was also awarded the First Prize for Environmental Protection (Pioneer Award) by Ford Conservation and Environment Grants in 2014, for their efforts to reduce local waste pollution and protect wildlife.

EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS LEARNT

Following the waste management method “decentralized collection - centralized sorting - long-distance transport - centralized disposal,” non-degradable and hazardous wastes can be moved from surrounding grassland and the station, which in turn cleans up the source region of the Yangtze River. The project also took strategic advantage of its location when encouraging passing vehicles to take packed recycled waste with them when they leave the plateau. The station itself ensured that the project could be conducted smoothly and take root in the local community. Support from the local government also played a vital role, and the successful and mutually beneficial involvement of the herdsman ensured long-term sustainability and the success of the project.

