

Eco Village ADD's initiatives

BACKGROUND

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are particularly vulnerable and there is a sense of urgency to adopt sustainable practices that will protect their limited natural resources and reduce living costs.

Individualised actions

In the Republic of Mauritius, initiatives aimed at ecological living are being encouraged and promoted. The efforts include rational use of energy and water, protecting natural resources, reviving traditional living practices, creating sustainable local businesses, encouraging eco-tourism, promoting eco-farming, creating environmentally minded communities and raising awareness. Ultimately the responsibility rests with individuals as well as communities to lessen their dependence on fossil fuels, abandon consumerist practices and organise their lifestyle and civic activities that are sustainable ecologically, economically and socially.

An effective community approach that has been tried elsewhere and is known to complement and reinforce effectively individual and national efforts to sustainable living is the concept of 'eco-village'.

Definition

Broadly, an eco-village has been defined as a *'human-scale full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future and incorporating multiple centres of initiatives'*.

PRACTICAL APPROACH TO APPLYING ECO-VILLAGE CONCEPT

Global Model

The above definition has been applied with variations in various countries. Invariably, they incorporate components of clustered housing, food security, green infrastructure, renewable energy and resources saving to minimize ecological footprint. In many countries it has been found easier to start afresh by establishing *new villages* along eco-village principles.

UK model

BedZED in Surrey was the UK's first large-scale mixed use sustainable community, with 100 homes, office space for around 100 workers and community facilities. Completed in 2002, BedZED is still the inspiration for low carbon neighbourhoods and *One Planet Communities* across the world.

Some of the major beneficial outcomes are given in the adjoining box.

Energy: 81% reduction in energy use for heating, 45% reduction in electricity use (compared to local av.).

Transport: 64% reduction in car mileage 2,318km/year (compared to national av.).

Water: 58% reduction in water use 72 litres/person/day (compared to local av.).

Waste: 60% waste recycled.

Food: 86% of residents buy organic food.

Community: residents know 20 neighbours by name on average.

Eco-village model in Mauritian context



PANCHVATI - Traditional game of spinning-top using aloe fibre extracted from the leaves of the plant

In Mauritius, the idea to establish eco-villages emerged a few years ago. The first nine villages initially selected by Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development are: Pointe aux Piments, Panchavati, Vieux Grand Port, Vuillemin, La Gaultette/Le Morne, Poudre d'Or, Clémencia, Souillac as well as Rivière Coco in Rodrigues. A sum of Rs 30 million was earmarked and implementation was scheduled to start in February 2011 with the construction of eco-villages at Pointe aux Piments and Panchavati. A more ambitious programme was subsequently planned. A call for proposal was launched in 2011 for the design, planning and construction of eco-villages in several places.

Rs 50 million were earmarked for each village.

Adapting model to existing situation – ADD's proposals

In a strict sense, eco-villages are generally small communities of 50 to 150 individuals who organise their lifestyle and community activities through a shared vision of an alternative to centralized electrical, water, waste disposal and sewage systems.

However, in the Mauritian context, the creation of such entities may not be practical for existing communities. Therefore, a more practical approach proposed by the

Association pour le Développement Durable (ADD) has been to adapt the basic concepts for a cluster of houses in existing villages. The selected groups of interested communities should be prepared to integrate a low environmental impact way of life while encouraging their integration in the wider national development processes.

The '*eco-village*' concept could integrate complementary processes that reduce the ecological footprint and save living costs - using alternative renewable energy sources and energy saving methods, water conservation and rain harvesting processes, ecological food production and waste management. An essential component will be a review of the design of the family and community living area. The Association has drawn plans for a few *eco-villages* in Mauritius.

Characteristics of the villages

The villages should have relatively few households and be relatively isolated so that the carbon footprints should be easily monitored and assessed. The extension of the original eco-village concept systematically to the chosen village in the context of the frame drawn by ADD is a daunting task in terms of sensitisation at grass roots level and investment. But the components of eco-village activities are well understood. The success of the method will contribute to greater awareness and serve as a model for others in the village and elsewhere.