

Ahan village in Azerbaijan develops participatory land-use plan to protect mountain soils

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Ahan is a village with a population of 519 people located in the high mountains of the Greater Caucasus region of Azerbaijan. The majority of the population engages in livestock farming, continuing a tradition of nomadic herding with a transhumance lifestyle. The community migrates to the winter pastures located in the plains during the cold months and spends the summer time in the high mountain pastures near the village.

In recent decades, the demand for high-quality local meat products has driven a rapid increase in livestock numbers, including both sheep and cattle. However, this growth, coupled with the negative impacts of climate change and overgrazing, led to the erosion of mountain soils and increased instances of floods and landslides. Deforestation further exacerbated the issue, causing local springs to dry up and landslides to jeopardize the road leading to the village.

To address these challenges, the community of Ahan came together and developed a participatory land-use plan. Local stakeholders including members of the municipality, women's groups, youth, livestock owners, beekeepers and gardeners actively engaged in developing the plan. The [Environmental Research Center of Khazar University](#), a member of the Mountain Partnership, further supported the community to identify key issues to be included. The plan allocated specific areas for pastures, garden, and forests, with grazing prohibited in certain zones. Rotational grazing was introduced to manage pastures more sustainably, and trees were planted along the road leading to the village.

As a result of these efforts, erosion processes were halted, and the vegetation in the upper part of the village was restored, leading to increased water supply from springs. The community's coordinated decisions and stakeholder involvement are credited with achieving healthier, climate-resilient soils and pastures, ensuring sustainable land use and long-term incomes. The Environmental Research Center of Khazar University continues its cooperation with the local community.

The integrated use of mountain soils in Ahan village is an example of the positive impact community-driven initiatives can have on maintaining sustainable mountain environments while meeting the demands of animal farming and protecting livelihoods.