

Caleb Wall
Doctoral Fellow
Zentrum für Entwicklungsforschung (Centre for Development Research)
University of Bonn
Germany

An Indigenous Agricultural Revolution in Uzbekistan? - The Potential of Local Agricultural Knowledge.

Abstract

Indigenous agricultural knowledge has been slow to develop in the post-Communist era. Whereas the Soviet system discouraged localised agricultural knowledge and methods it is increasingly vital that indigenous knowledge systems are developed and encouraged in the post-Communist era. The economic, environmental and ecological impacts of universalistic methods of rural production have been severe. In order for these impacts to be mitigated there needs to be a return to localised, farmer level, knowledge systems.

This paper analyses the impacts of the command agricultural system on the environment and society of Khorezm. Especially how Moscow mandated farming methods played a large role in drying the Aral Sea and polluting the region with pesticides and other chemicals. In the post-Communist era the Tashkent government has maintained a top-down command approach to farming knowledge. This has favoured the creation of universally applicable methods, regardless of the significant differences in agricultural systems throughout Uzbekistan. These methods, dangerously incognisant of the realities of farming in Uzbekistan, have promoted short term central state aims above the needs of the rural population or the environment. Whilst there has been some move away from cotton monoculture post 1991, the system of compulsory state acquisition of 'strategic crops' continues to militate against effective agricultural development. Furthermore the imposition of centrally mandated farming methods, such as the 'plough police', poses a serious constraint to the growth of indigenous agricultural knowledge.

It is argued in this paper that this approach to agricultural knowledge is outdated, outmoded and antiquated. It would be better for all parties if a localised system of indigenous agricultural knowledge is encouraged. This will necessitate a move away from central state mandated methods, as well as concomitant reforms in the areas of irrigation, land tenure and agrarian inputs.

Drawing on case study analysis in the Khorezm region, incipient forms of local agricultural knowledge are compared to the centralised norms promoted during the Soviet and immediate post-Soviet period. The paper concludes with some suggestions on how indigenous agricultural knowledge can be promoted, especially by external development projects.