COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

for social and psychological rehabilitation

in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine

Achievements and Prospects
UNESCO

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The opinions expressed in this brochure by the author are not necessarily those of UNESCO.

The photos and legends were selected by UNESCO.
The accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station in April 1986 remains the most dramatic and far-reaching civil catastrophe in modern history and still affects the lives of millions of people, as much today as a decade ago.

After the Republics of Belarus, Ukraine and the former USSR appealed to world governments and international organisations to help them cope with the consequences of the disaster, UNESCO was one of the first UN agencies to respond. When I signed the Framework Agreement creating the UNESCO Chernobyl Programme, on 9 January 1991, UNESCO's basic premise was that, beyond the tragic health and ecological impacts of the accident, there were going to be major economic, psychological and social consequences for all the people living in or near the contaminated areas. Indeed, the disaster was bound to put an enormous political and economic strain on each of the countries concerned.

Sadly, history has borne out this forecast. One of the main conclusions of the World Health Organisation conference on the health effects of Chernobyl, organised in November 1995 with the participation of UNESCO, was that some of the most significant consequences of the accident have turned out to be social and psychological. The catastrophe has had devastating effects on the well-being of many of the 600,000 so-called 'liquidators' who worked to contain the spread of radioactivity, while up to nine million ordinary people have been affected, many of them still living in these areas.

Many speakers at this conference emphasised that, even though ten years have passed since the accident, the human catastrophe is by no means over. The main UN Chernobyl programmes must be maintained. Out of the thirty projects which UNESCO has implemented for Chernobyl, the Community Development Centres initiative has gone beyond all expectations in the scope and range of its effects. It deserves to be a focus for further international co-operation.

As this brochure aims to show, the idea of community centres as places where those traumatised by the catastrophe can find specialised care, where people of all ages can express themselves and where they can take an active part in local development, is entirely new in these countries. Over the past two years, the Centres have developed a very innovative programme of activities, progressively adapting to the specific needs of each of the three countries. Where
possible, links are made with local schools, hospitals and other national institutions, as well as with foreign institutions and individuals, either on a professional or a personal basis.

The UNESCO Chernobyl Programme has provided an opportunity to develop a true international partnership between 'Western' countries and the Russian Federation, Belarus and Ukraine, in which both sides have contributed financially and intellectually to building a more democratic and prosperous future for the victims of the disaster.

The national authorities and UNESCO are now planning to introduce the know-how and materials gained from this experience into the teaching curriculum of higher education institutions in the three countries. Special use is being made of the Centres' unique case-studies as a basis for teaching materials.

Another major initiative, launched in 1995 with the national authorities, is a large-scale project to inform the general public in the three countries about radiation and how to minimise further contamination. Fear and uncertainty about radiation are still, ten years after the catastrophe, among the most significant sources of stress today.

Now that the initial centres have found their own equilibrium and that their core programmes are fully operational, non-governmental organisations and international institutions are encouraged to apply to use the Centres as a means to foster the sustainable social and economic development of the communities concerned. This is the only lasting solution to the social and psychological problems currently facing the population.

The Community Development Centres are therefore playing an increasingly active role as catalysts for social and economic development. But they remain first and foremost schools of initiative and democracy through the practice of genuine community action. Their purpose is not to teach sociology or to preach human rights, but to give communities the opportunity to see for themselves how these principles can help them develop - individually and collectively - and live harmoniously with others, whether at work, in the family or during leisure time.

This brochure attempts to illustrate the context in which the Centres are working, by reminding the reader about the exceptionally rapid development of the former USSR over the past ten years and about the tremendous consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. I hope that, by providing details about the Centres and their activities, the reader will appreciate the many opportunities they offer for international co-operation.

I should like to invite all UNESCO partners to visit the Centres created so far and to discuss with the national authorities and UNESCO ways in which they can join in this very significant project.

Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO

Adnan Bedran, Deputy Director General of UNESCO, inaugurating the Community development centres in November 1994.
The Chernobyl disaster took place against a backdrop of monumental political and economic change in the societies it affected. This short kaleidoscope of events over the last decade aims to provide a context for the reader to understand the full extent of this human tragedy - and the difficulties encountered by all organisations trying to help mitigate the consequences.

**Perestroika**

The power station exploded just thirteen months after Mikhail Gorbachev had taken over as Head of state of the USSR, leading an attempt to revitalise the Soviet System through the reforms of perestroika. Ironically, the disaster accelerated some of the changes underway.

**Glasnost**

The accident occurred during a period of massive State investment to step up industrial efficiency, with a crackdown on alcoholism and black-market trading and the introduction of glasnost (intended as constructive criticism of the Communist system). Meanwhile, Gorbachev began to wind down the military machine Brezhnev had set up, opening the way for an end to the cold war.

With influential intellectuals calling for an end to censorship, Gorbachev could no longer let the State react to the Chernobyl disaster as it had to other catastrophes - by saying nothing. Two months after the explosion, he appointed liberals to run the newspapers and broadcasting.

**The move to a market economy**

As over half a million people, mostly Soviet soldiers, were cleaning up the radioactive debris from Chernobyl and hundreds of thousands of evacuees were coping with the loss of their homes, the Soviet Union was gradually breaking up under pressure from within as well as outside.

In 1987 came the first moves towards a market economy, with the legalisation of private enterprises and foreign investment. But, as private sector initiatives appeared, the government-planned economy - faced with world market forces for the first time - started to disintegrate.

**Six regimes collapse**

After a year of nationalist agitation throughout the Soviet Union in 1988, the next three years saw the final break-up of the USSR. In June 1989 the first multiparty elections since 1918 were held, while six regimes in the Eastern bloc collapsed in seven months, culminating in the fall of the Berlin wall in November that year.

Twelve months later, perestroika was dead - the USSR had switched to capitalism. Gorbachev was gradually losing his grip, caught between conservatives and the new democrats, led by Boris Yeltsin - his former liberal protégé.

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**Chronology**

- **1985**
  - Gorbachev elected First Secretary of the Communist Party
  - Perestroika launched
  - Industrial reforms

- **1986**
  - Gorbachev promises nuclear disarmament by the year 2000
  - Glasnost launched
  - Chernobyl disaster
  - Liberalisation of press
  - Self-employment authorised
  - Disident Andrei Sakharov freed

- **1987**
  - Radical economic reforms started
  - Nationalist demonstrations in Azerbaijan and Georgia
  - Boris Yeltsin, head of Party in Moscow, emerges as critic of old-guard, then removed from post
  - Reagan/Gorbachev summit

- **1988**
  - Nationalist agitation in Caucasus and Baltic republics
  - End of Afghan war

- **1989**
  - First democratic elections since 1918
  - Yeltsin wins Moscow seat in Supreme Soviet
  - Economic recession
  - Miners strike in Ukraine and Siberia

- **Six East European countries abandon communism**
- **1990**
  - Mass demonstrations in USSR for independence
  - Democrats win local/regional elections in major cities
  - Legalisation of political parties
  - Yeltsin elected President of new Supreme Soviet of Russian Federation
  - Yeltsin resigns from Party
  - Perestroika abandoned
  - Conservatives re-assert their authority
The Commonwealth of Independent States

In January 1990 Lithuania declared its independence. The following year a cascade of other republics followed suit, including Belarus and Ukraine. In May, Yeltsin was elected President of the Supreme Soviet of Russia - on an anti-Communist ticket - while Gorbachev remained as Head of State of the USSR.

By the end of 1991, the job was done. Gorbachev resigned after a right-wing coup, Yeltsin quit the Communist Party and became President of the new Russian Federation in a free vote. All the republics of the former USSR, except Georgia and three Baltic states, joined to form the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Transition

The shift to a market economy brought several casualties. By 1990 the economy was in ruins, with a fall in production unparalleled in any industrialised country since the Depression.

The 1992 deregulation of prices led to a drop in salaries - often paid months late - as inflation soared out of control. Intellectuals and soldiers lost their previous social status, while a new, wealthy elite was growing up, based on international trade (and, sometimes, on crime), exaggerating social inequalities. Growing unemployment added to the problems.

Today, the State continues to provide social services and is trying to improve their organisation. But, without the support of industrial monopolies, many services and facilities are no longer guaranteed. The fragile new private sector has been unable to take over this role. Meanwhile, for millions, the family and the kitchen garden continue to be the ultimate, and most reliable, buffers during hard times.
The worst civil nuclear disaster ever and its impacts on the population

What happened

The N° 4 reactor of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine was barely three years old and the Soviet authorities were proud of it. On 26 April 1986, operators on the night shift shut down all but one of the reactor’s safety systems for an experiment. At 1.23 a.m. things started to go wrong: the nuclear reaction suddenly went out of control, shattering the fuel rods. Steam pressure soared, blasting the 2000-ton lid off the reactor and releasing toxic radionuclides into the atmosphere.

The Soviet authorities were unprepared for such a catastrophe - as may have been most other governments at that time. They rushed in thousands of troops to back up local fire-fighters and medical workers, but told the public nothing.*

These so-called ‘liquidators’ took enormous risks with their lives but finally doused the fire and stifled the radioactive core in record time. Thirty-one of them died of burns and radiation within days. Another 209 suffered the pain and nausea of acute radiation sickness, but survived. The indirect death toll is thought to be much higher.

In the ten days it took to stop the fires, winds had carried the radioactive cloud over what has since become the independent states of Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation - and as far away as Sweden, Greece and Britain. Wherever it rained, the radionuclides fell to Earth, poisoning thousands of square kilometres of land until well into the next century.

*A The need to inform the public about the disaster finally helped break 70 years of press censorship in the former USSR and promote greater openness in the West concerning nuclear energy.

A quarter of a million refugees

As the power plant burned, the 45,000 residents of nearby Pripyat prepared for the annual May Day celebrations. Children stopped on the railway bridge to watch the fire. Even a week later, the Soviet authorities had given no information about the accident and no instructions on how to limit exposure to radiation. Iodine tablets were issued but came too late to prevent the outbreak of thyroid cancers we are witnessing today.

Over the next ten days, a 30 km radius zone around the power plant was evacuated - 135,000 men.
"We first heard about the accident on Sunday 27th when the victims came to the hospital here. It looked like a small-scale war, with tanks, ambulances and personnel carriers racing by. The light from the headlights was so strong you could read a newspaper at night".

*Doctor*. Ivankiv, Ukraine.

"I was afraid. I could see the reactor burning, but I didn’t know what it meant. At first we had no protective clothing. But on the second day we made our own masks using what we had".

*Sergei*. Liquidator, aged 32

Women and children left their homes, farms and orchards forever.

At first the authorities placed evacuees with other families in ‘clean’ areas, often over 100 km from home. They found themselves uprooted, separated from friends and relatives, wondering what had happened to their grandparents, children, or next-door neighbours. It would sometimes be months before they found each other.

Once the solidarity of the early days of the disaster had worn off, the evacuees were often not welcomed. Local people thought they were radioactive, calling them ‘glow worms’ or ‘fireflies’. To make matters worse, these outsiders moved into the flats that local families had been waiting ten years for.
650,000 Liquidators

From hero... In the two years following the disaster, over 650,000 liquidators* cleaned up the aftermath of the reactor explosion. In a few days, the first wave of helicopter pilots, fire-fighters and drivers had received over ten times the normal lifetime dose of radiation.

In the Spring and Summer of 1986, 8000 men worked round the clock to build a concrete and steel 'sarcophagus' over the exposed reactor core. Some worked like ants, each carrying two buckets of cement up a ladder to build the 50 metre high walls. Every twenty-minute round trip exposed them to dangerous levels of radiation.

Over the next two years, hundreds of thousands of men removed debris and topsoil around the power station. They even cut down and buried an entire spruce forest - the evergreens, having turned red from radiation, were a new hazard. Today, there are 800 radioactive dumps in the exclusion zone, some not even covered over.

...to ailing outcast. The fate of the liquidators will never be known for certain - they are not all registered with the authorities. Some returned to their homes all over the former Soviet Union, or emigrated.

Most of the first waves of liquidators have developed symptoms of premature ageing, like lung disease, heart problems and arthritis. Some have committed suicide, others have turned to drink. Their wives are afraid to have more children. Depression is common.

In Ukraine alone, about 4000 of the 173,416 registered liquidators are reported to have died. The Ukraine Ministry of Public Health claims that 77% of the deaths in this group in 1994 were due to Chernobyl.

The Chernobyl Union estimates that about 10% (35,000) of Russian liquidators are now disabled and 7000 have died, from various causes, including suicide.

Liquidators who took part in later clean-up operations (the majority), however, are healthier and usually able to work.

* The estimated number of liquidators varies according to the definition and source used.

"In January (1995) we finished our annual medical check-up on 1200 schoolchildren. Only 15 were considered healthy".

Doctor, Ivankiv, Ukraine.
A sick generation?

Radioactive iodine was part of the fallout from Chernobyl. The few short weeks before it decayed were enough to sow the seeds of the thyroid cancers that are just beginning to emerge today.

In the Gomel region of Belarus - one of the worst affected - the rate of thyroid cancers in children under 15 years old has jumped from less than one per million before the accident to 100 per million since 1991. There has been a three-fold increase in thyroid cancers in adults.

In Ukraine these cancers went up by 10% in the period 1981-1994. In Russia, 45 new cases were reported in the Bryansk region in 1995. Experts expect numbers to grow for the next ten years then gradually fall back to levels before the accident.

If detected in time, over 90% of thyroid cancers can be cured. But the tumours in children are very small and hard to see. And even if the three countries have specialists as good as elsewhere, there is a critical lack of money for equipment, reagents and medicines.

The general health of evacuated children and those living in the contaminated areas is notoriously poor - UNICEF has estimated increases of 20 to 60% in a variety of illnesses in children in contaminated areas of Belarus. The most common complaints are lowered immunity and anaemia. Tiredness, loss of concentration, nosebleeds, frequent colds, high blood pressure are common. It is too early to see if there will be an increase in leukemias.

“We arrived in Pripyat at 2 pm on 27th April. There were more than 1000 buses. At 4 pm there was a 20 km column leaving the town. By 29th April the town was empty”

Sergei, Liquidator, Ustovaya, Russian Federation

“Our children will grow up to be sick, unemployed and without proper education”

Teacher, Ivankiv, Ukraine

Some international organisations put these symptoms down to ‘radiophobia’ - fear of radiation. Ignorance about the real dangers, rumours, stress and unhealthy conditions definitely make matters worse.
Other impacts of the Catastrophe

Closing the power station

Of the four reactors at the Chernobyl Power Plant, two are still working (N°1 and 3). The 1986 explosion destroyed reactor N°4, while a fire in the turbine room shut down the N°2 reactor in 1991. Despite recent modifications, the RBMK reactor design is still notoriously unstable.

The concrete and steel 'sarcophagus', built around the N°4 reactor, was supposed to last 30 years. But a delegation of European Commission experts has concluded that it should be replaced before the end of the century. It was put up in a hurry, with poor quality materials. The roof leaks and there are huge cracks in the walls.

The Ukraine government can neither afford to decommission the reactor nor do without the 8% it contributes to the country's electricity needs. Unless the country is to become more dependent on Russia, it needs an alternative energy source. On 20 December 1995, the government of Ukraine signed an agreement with the G7 nations to close the power station by the year 2000. The international community will contribute US$800 millions to this project - but the real cost, both in economic and social terms - will be far higher.

Closing the power station means that new jobs will have to be created for the 6,400 staff, if the nearby town of Slavutych, where they live, is not to be deprived of its income.

"When we heard that soldiers were being sent to Chernobyl as liquidators, we all felt we were better off fighting in the war".

Yuri, Afghan war veteran.

"Our job was to dig a tunnel under the reactor and put in cooling equipment. We had no special clothes. There was breathing apparatus but we did not use it - it was very hot. We worked for three hours at a time pulling up over 70 wagons of earth by hand. Eight of the forty men in our team have since died and all the others are sick".

Vladimir, ex-miner and liquidator, aged 45 (THE PROJECT WAS LATER ABANDONED).

Impacts of contamination

The 800 dumps of contaminated soil, debris and machinery from the disaster are a major threat to the water table in the region around Chernobyl. According to French nuclear specialists, a further 5000 m² of highly contaminated water from the power plant is also slowly seeping towards the Pripyat river.

Just 1/6 gram of radioactive caesium is enough to make a square kilometre of land unfit for agricultural use. An area of about 105,000 km² - 20% the size of France - is contaminated with levels of over 1 Curie/km²². Fruit, crops, dairy produce and game from contaminated areas all have to be strictly monitored or prepared before they are passed for consumption. Much is simply banned. Thousands of farmers have lost their livelihood.

At least 284,000 people have been uprooted from their family homes and moved to distant communities or new towns.

* Ci/km² means "Curie per square kilometre" and is a measure of radioactivity on the ground. Residents of areas contaminated above 15 Ci/km² are guaranteed resettlement on demand.

"At first, people asked to have their fruit checked for radiation. Now they don't care. Economic problems are more important."

Administrator, Pershoy, Belarus.
Economic effects - a double disaster

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the newly-independent states of Belarus and Ukraine, along with the Russian Federation, have each taken on the Chernobyl burden in their own territories. About 13% of the State budget in Belarus, 4% in Ukraine and 1% in the Russian Federation goes to mop up the effects of the disaster.

Already coping with the stress of evacuation, food controls and illness, the affected population is now struggling with soaring prices, plummeting wages and unemployment, following government reforms for the difficult move to a market-led economy. As a result, poor people ignore food regulations, buying what is cheapest, no matter where it comes from. Today, eating contaminated food is one of the most significant ways Chernobyl fallout gets into the body.

Some of the most needed professionals, such as doctors and teachers, have already left the affected areas. Meanwhile, a wealthy, organised criminal class, with access to hard currency, is emerging, their gleaming foreign limousines and new villas a poignant contrast with the poverty of the majority.

Chernobyl benefits - a mixed blessing

Soon after the catastrophe, the Soviet authorities introduced benefits and special measures for victims. These range from free medical care to disability payments and bonuses (nicknamed ‘coffin bonuses’) that can double a worker’s pay packet in a contaminated area.

Today, several million people are claiming benefits, many with no real justification. Some nationals living abroad are returning home and moving to contaminated areas, just to receive the aid.

For many households the Chernobyl benefits have become a major source of income, trapping people between a desire to escape the radiation and a fear of losing the compensation. The principle of blanket benefits is even hindering sustainable development. The affected countries will therefore need to find new forms of support that enable claimants to contribute better to the economy and regain self-respect.

Nikolskaya Sloboda, a new settlement where UNESCO has established a Community Centre.
Social and psychological impact

Experts now agree that some of the most significant long-term effects of the Chernobyl disaster are social and psychological. Surveys and observations have uncovered a whole set of complaints, such as:

- Low self esteem (53% of the population in one survey).
- A tendency to link all illnesses to Chernobyl.
- High personal anxiety.
- Feelings of being a victim.
- Feeling there is no future.
- Feeling unable to influence the present or the future.
- Reduced intellectual achievement.
- Social tensions over eligibility for Chernobyl benefits.
- Conflict between healthy living and the need to save or earn money by accepting contamination.
- Mistrust of government experts and information.
- In some cases, individuals - or whole communities - hide their fear and depression by cultivating a false optimism, denying that Chernobyl has any negative consequences.
- Escapism through alcohol and drugs.

When asked in a recent survey, teenagers affected by Chernobyl estimated their life expectancy to be 12 years shorter, on average, than teenagers who were not affected.

Misinformation and radiophobia

The secrecy surrounding anything to do with nuclear energy and atomic bombs has led to a blanket of ignorance and fear of radiation, even in open societies throughout the world. This was magnified beyond imagination by the absent, contradictory and misleading information put out by the Soviet authorities after the accident.

This initial mismanagement of information had lasting effects. Despite every effort by the three governments to be open and direct later on, only about 20% of people in the affected areas believe official information or advice, even if it comes from their own doctor. They put every minor complaint "UNESCO has established a centre for psychological rehabilitation adjacent to the Abakovo hospital clinics where thousands of children spend up to three weeks for personal and treatment for radiation-related illnesses. There is a pilot project for the integration of psychological and educational services within a hospital setting."

Over 200,000 people have been evacuated from the settlements. Many have no jobs and need assistance."
down to radiation. This understandable anxiety significantly impairs their quality of life.

A population dispossessed

For the victims of Chernobyl, many of the ties that could have given them the strength to overcome their problems - community based relations, traditions, culture and religion - were broken by Stalinism and Soviet Socialism.

People learned not to confide in each other, national traditions and languages were suppressed and churches were knocked down, used for storage or turned into museums. When Chernobyl exploded, the victims had no-one and nothing to turn to - existing services could offer no real help. The evacuations pulled families apart, dropping them tens or hundreds of kilometres from their homes into unfamiliar communities or barren new towns.

Meanwhile, the sudden and rapid changes after independence, followed by an economic crisis, have stretched most people beyond their powers to cope. Stress and depression are palpable. And decades of State control have robbed people of their ability to take initiative and to adapt.

Lessons learned

The Chernobyl accident revealed just how unprepared the Soviet authorities were for a civil nuclear disaster. The emergency plan was inadequate, while rescue workers were given ineffective protective clothing and equipment. It also forced the rest of the world to take another look at their own prevention and emergency measures.

The conditions that provoked the Chernobyl explosion were extreme - safety systems were deliberately turned off - but exposed critical flaws in the RBMK reactor design, raising doubts about the safety of 17 similar installations in Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania despite improved safety features.

The accident also uncovered deficiencies in the Soviet social, psychological and medical services. Before Chernobyl, there were no nuclear radiation specialists in Ukraine or Belarus, while health monitoring services were inadequate or non-existent. There were also no facilities to help victims deal with the trauma of the events.

The need to inform the public about the disaster was instrumental in lifting the cloak of secrecy that characterised the Soviet regime, ending with a more open press. Information is still one of the major catalysts for social change, which is why UNESCO has included several information projects in its Chernobyl Programme.
The Soviet Union tried to tackle the Chernobyl disaster on its own for more than three years, but after the break-up of the old regime in 1990, the newly-independent states realised they could not cope alone. The Republic of Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation appealed to the international community for help.

In co-operation with other agencies of the United Nations system, UNESCO immediately launched its Chernobyl Programme and looked for extra-budgetary support. A formal agreement was signed in January 1991. Five years later, the resources of the Programme have grown to more than US$9 million.

In consultation with the three countries, UNESCO put forward over 70 project proposals within its fields of competence (education, science, culture, communication and social science). Around thirty of the projects are now well underway or have already been completed. Others are still being planned or are waiting for financial support.

The UNESCO Chernobyl Programme harnesses the efforts of 29 Member States and about 150 people in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, working full-time. It is supervised by a Steering Committee made up of representatives of each of the three Republics and specialists from UNESCO, covering its areas of competence.

The Programme's Secretariat is based at UNESCO in Paris, with a Project office in Kiev. The Ministries of Chernobyl in each of the three countries ensure the co-ordination of all relevant ministries and national institutions.

Each project, depending on its scale, is also supervised by a national co-ordinator and involves national specialists.

Aims of the Programme

A priority of the Programme has been to deliver regular, tangible results to show those affected that they are not forgotten. Sometimes this means overcoming tremendous obstacles, including the initial mistrust, the search for short-term gains, a devastated economy, hyper-inflation, the lack of building materials - and the novelty of some of the ideas.

The Chernobyl Programme also delivers a process that enables Member States to carry out projects, while nurturing confidence in the affected communities.

In the medium and long term, the Programme aims to enable the three countries to integrate the results of internationally-supported projects into a strategy for sustainable development and to improve the quality of life of victims.

To achieve this, the Programme seeks:
- to develop an overall understanding of the consequences of the catastrophe and to inform the victims of what they can do to protect themselves
- to train specialists in different fields
- to promote scientific research and carry out major pilot projects
- to help national institutions use the experience gained
- to strengthen the links between national specialists and colleagues abroad
- to inform the international community of the true effects of the Chernobyl catastrophe.

The UNESCO Community Development Centres finally aim to empower the victims themselves, encouraging individual leadership and social responsibility.

In 1990, 34 tons of urgent supplies were delivered over a three day period with the help of the Russian airforce to hospitals and dispensaries in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine.
Above: General view of the site selected for the Economic and Social Development Area, near Gagarin, in a pristine region of Central Russia (see map on p. 16). One of the main long-term actions of the Programme, it is designed to receive populations currently living in contaminated areas.

Left: Masterplan of the Zone, approved by local, regional and national authorities in December 1995.

Programme Outline
The idea of creating Community Development Centres - one of the UNESCO Chernobyl Programme’s major projects - sprang out of problems recognised by the three Republics:

- large numbers of people suffering distress as a direct result of the accident,
- a suspicious, fearful, dependent, ill-informed public unable to talk about their worries,
- dislocated communities searching for their local and cultural identity,
- a local economy increasingly unable to guarantee full employment.

From the outset, the project organisers decided to work within the existing social structure, involving local and regional administrative and political figures.

**Aims**

The main objectives of the Community Centres are to:

- encourage people to take control over their lives and express themselves
- improve the psychological well-being of all age and social groups
- promote problem-solving ability
- develop confidence and social responsibility
- improve family cohesion and parenting skills
- contribute to local development through community initiatives.
- develop social and psychological practice in the three countries
- act as models for new Community Centres

**Methods**

Centre staff are continually updating the range of activities they offer. They rely on a spectrum of techniques, including:

- casework, with a focus on individual and family therapy
- group work with problem - and at-risk groups
- community relations, oriented towards local organisations, neighbourhood groups and institutions

Professional standards are maintained by:

- continuous staff supervision and training
- regular evaluation of the centres
- professional co-ordination at national level
Community Development Centres in

**Aksamovshyna**
In temporary accommodation since its creation, this Centre is located in a village of 865 inhabitants, 32 km west of Minsk, in a ‘clean’ area. It will move into its final premises in June 1996 in the beautiful grounds of the Clinic of Nuclear Medicine - a major referral Centre for the worst-affected Chernobyl victims. Over 4000 patients a year come for examinations and treatment, often lasting two or three weeks.

**Strechyna**
Streichyn is a rural village located in a clean area, 250 km from Minsk and 70 km from Gomel (one of the areas most contaminated by Chernobyl fallout). The Centre was purpose-built in a new settlement created for evacuees from highly contaminated areas.

**Pershay**
A village about 70 km north of Minsk in a contaminated zone (1-5 Ci/km²) within a ‘clean’ area. The Centre cooperates closely with the local hospital and schools.
Building the Centres

Site selection

In the first discussions with UNESCO, the Soviet Chernobyl Ministry planned to build three Centres, in areas where there were significant groups of evacuees or liquidators.

By January 1993, the priorities of the three newly-independent countries (each with its own Chernobyl Ministry) had changed. There should be nine centres, three in each country, catering for liquidators and evacuees moved to 'clean' areas, as well as people still living in the contaminated zones.

Criteria

The final criteria for Centre sites included:
- community size (four are in villages, others in small towns and one is part of a clinic)
- urban/rural (several are in rural areas, others in industrial areas)
- old/new settlement (two are in new communities)
- radioactive contamination (some are in contaminated areas, others in 'clean' areas)
- demographic characteristics of the communities (presence of liquidators, evacuees, sick children, etc)
- local authority commitment - this became a criterion for the later centres.

Funding

The Belarus and Ukraine Chernobyl Ministries and the Russian Federation's EMERCOM provided the buildings and covered most of the cost of the conversions or construction. They also pay staff salaries and basic running costs.

Meanwhile, UNESCO found extra-budgetary funding from:
- Canada (full-time foreign staff)
- Deutscher Caritas-Verband (for the Aksakovshyna Centre)
- Diakonisches Werk der EKD (for three Centres)
- UNICEF (for four centres)
- UN Chernobyl Trust Fund
- The Netherlands

Planning and construction

Three of the centres - Nikolskaya Sloboda, Strechyn and Aksakovshyna - were especially designed for UNESCO by French architects, Agence d'Architecture des Gobelins, (who donated their services). The others have undergone careful renovations, also designed by the same architects, in close co-operation with national architects in each country.

The total cost of the project so far is more than US $2 million.

Triumph over obstacles

Despite a saga of setbacks and obstacles, only two of the planned new buildings - Aksakovshyna (Belarus) and Bolshoy (Russia) - were not finished in time for the official inauguration in 1994. The staff continue to work in temporary accommodation while their final premises are being completed.

The Chernobyl Ministries and authorities in the three countries maintained their faith in the project, even though they initially had only a vague idea of the final outcome of their investment. They also worked to finish the Centres in circumstances that would have discouraged many people - from bureaucratic obstacles and shortages of materials to severe winters.

As the Centres opened - and visitors liked what they saw - the effects snowballed. The authorities felt that their efforts had been rewarded, decision-makers could gain confidence for other investments, administrators had gained precious experience in organising and completing such a new and complex international project.
Borodyanka
Borodyanka is a small industrial town (population 14,498) on the edge of a slightly contaminated zone (1-5 Ci/km²), 45 km from Kiev. The Centre opened in November 1994. There are about 1500 liquidators and 7000 evacuees from the 30 km zone in the district with 600 children born into these families. The Centre is the largest of the Project.

Slavutych
Opened February 1994 in a new town (population 26,347) located in a 'clean' area on the edge of the 30 km zone, Slavutych was built to house the Chernobyl Power Plant staff and their families. The first residents arrived in March 1988. With the Plant scheduled to close by the year 2000, the Centre will have an increasingly important role to play in the community.

Ivankiv
A small town (12,000) in a slightly contaminated area (1-5 Ci/km²) area on the edge of the 30 km exclusion zone, 40 km from the Chernobyl power station. About 3520 liquidators live in the town, with another 1218 in the district. There are also 50 evacuee families from Chernobyl, with another 1800 in the district. The Centre opened in May 1994.
Nikolskaya Sloboda
A new settlement, built for evacuees (population about 1000 including surrounding hamlets) located in a clean zone about 100 km from Bryansk. The closest town is Zukowka (population 20,500), 15 km away. The Centre opened in November 1994 and serves as a model for the development of other regional institutions.

Uzlovaya
Opened November 1994. Population about 100,000. An industrial and coal-mining town in a contaminated area (5-15 Ci/km²), 250 km south of Moscow, with about 90 liquidators. The largest town with a UNESCO Community Development Centre.

Belkovo
In temporary accommodation since October 1993. Population about 13,000. A small rural town in a contaminated area (5-15 Ci/km²), about 200 km south of Moscow. Once a rich trading town with fur and leather industries. The Centre is now well accepted by the population but still awaits its final building.
Building a new profession: social work

Programme structure

As a rule, each Centre has a staff of 10 to 20 people: a manager, from three to seven social workers, an accountant, day-care workers trained in psychology, a receptionist and activities organisers, not to mention ancillary staff. Volunteers may teach particular activities, such as art and sports.

Each country has a national co-ordinator and a national supervisor, trained in psychology, who visits each Centre for 2-3 days every month, while a psychologist monitors the entire project from the UNESCO project office in Kiev.

Recruitment of staff

As a first step, UNESCO opened an office in Kiev and appointed two experienced clinical psychologists. They work with representatives of the Chernobyl ministries and oversee progress on the Centres. In the first year this ranged from almost daily construction problems to finding staff and equipment.

It has not been easy to find qualified staff for the Centres. Ukraine, for example, had only 800 psychologists for a population of 52 million. There is another obstacle: the Centres are mostly in small towns and rural areas, while the few qualified psychologists prefer to stay in the large cities where they have good jobs.

Training

Psychotherapy - in the Western sense - and social work did not exist under the Soviet regime, where psychology was linked to ideology and where social services were dispersed or inadequate. This meant that psychology training was not geared to the needs of people visiting the Centres.

So, for two months a year on average since 1993, UNESCO has been providing intensive training in social work, psychology and community centre management for staff. Each year, three social workers go to the Institut Catholique de l'Ouest, in France, for advanced training and field work - a programme that UNESCO hopes to be able to extend to other countries.

The UNESCO Chernobyl Programme also provides weekly foreign language courses so that staff can read foreign literature on their profession and communicate with colleagues abroad.

A new profession

The Centres are playing an increasing role in modernising the caring professions, both through their approach to individual and family problems and through specialised staff training.

Because social work did not exist within the Soviet system, UNESCO has had to negotiate with national authorities of the three republics to establish an appropriate status for the Centres and their staff. In 1993 the first moves towards legitimacy were made - drawing up a temporary charter for the Centres, opening bank accounts and appointing national supervisors.

Meanwhile, social workers also received professional recognition, with contracts adopted on a one-year trial basis. These conditions were revised in 1995 but will need some more changes to reflect the professional skills of staff. At the moment, salaries and status are linked to those of school-teachers - but the working hours and pressures are not the same. Centre staff have to work when their communities have free time - in evenings, at weekends and on public holidays.

The Centres are a unique experiment and already represent a rich resource of experience. This includes relatively new therapeutic techniques - counselling, support groups, family therapy - as well as the means to promote community development.

This will be increasingly important as the capacity for individual responsibility gradually replaces decades of dependency on the State.

As this new profession grows, the Centre staff should play an important role, teaching the next generation of staff.
Programme of activities

Only part of the activity of the Centres is devoted to relieving the social and psychological trauma following the Chernobyl disaster. They also aim to encourage self-reliance and collective action within the local community.

In the Summer of 1993 Centre staff carried out surveys to find out more about the local people, their needs and skills. They then developed a basic programme of activities, which evolved as local problems became known, incorporating specific requests and cultural events.

Play Centres

Each Centre has a well-equipped play room, with educational toys, paints, etc. Child psychologists use these facilities for diagnosis and play therapy with emotionally disturbed children. The play centres offer children a transitional space where they can learn to establish relationships.

Adults sometimes first visit a Centre with their children. They then stay for a cup of tea and a chat... and often come back alone another day to discuss their own problems.

Movement exercises enable children to express themselves. By structuring interactions, games can help the child learn social rules.

Outdoor activities and celebration contribute in an important way to the success of Centres.

Working individually or in small groups, psychologists open the way for in-depth discussions with children.
Individual, group and family counselling

With so many worries, most families affected by Chernobyl have at least one member who could benefit from counselling. Alcoholism, depression, illness, under-achievement at school and delinquency are common preoccupations in communities where there are Centres. Psychologists receive individual groups and entire families, often over several sessions, and ensure follow-up.

A positive relationship with the therapist can help an individual to come to terms with his or her past.

Problems can become less intimidating when they are discussed within a group.

The family can be thought of as the primary group. Like any group, it needs to resolve problems. The therapist can help each member reflect on his or her relationships and place in the family.

Support groups

Many of the problems facing individuals are shared by others in the community. The Centres provide a place for them to meet and discuss their worries. A social worker or psychologist is on hand if they need professional guidance. Alcoholics, liquidators, evacuees, young mothers and others have formed support groups in the Centres, while the work of local associations is encouraged.

Social activities, like birthday parties and festivals, can help build a sense of community.

Some problems are shared by a whole generation. Informal groups can be a powerful way to reduce the pain of bad memories.
Education and sports

Some Centres have rooms large enough for sports, like karate and boxing. All carry out educational activities with children and adolescents, including ecology, art, using computers, cookery, dance, music and writing. Often these activities are run by volunteers.

1- Scientific activities

2- Foreign languages

3- Crafts

1. An environmental education group measuring radioactivity.

2. Many centres run language classes for the population allowing them direct access to foreign books and magazines.

3. Arts and crafts provide an opportunity for creative expression.
All Centres are equipped with facilities for sports - a good way to counteract stress and anxiety, while helping staff identify potential behavioural problems.

5- Music

Music plays an increasing role in the Centres. "Musique Espérance", a non-profit-making organisation founded by the famous Argentinian pianist, Miguel Angel Estrella (photo right), has launched a programme including workshops to encourage musical expression and exchanges with musicians from foreign countries.

6- Computer skills

Children and adolescents are especially keen to work with computers.

7- Painting, ceramics

The centres provide opportunities to develop an age-old tradition of expression through arts and crafts.
Information

Information is the first step to empowerment. Providing honest and reliable information has tremendous potential benefits, after so many years of deception and secrecy. People can gain confidence and learn to take initiatives. All Centres have desk-top publishing facilities to produce leaflets and newsletters. Most organise public debates and seminars.

1 - Informing the public

Centres provide information services for the public and organise regular lectures and discussions on a range of topics of interest. Volunteers often assist staff.

2 - Publishing

All Centres produce at least one newsletter designed for the local Community. Distribution is limited by the availability of funds.

Economic activities

Regeneration of the economic activities of the community will play a central rôle in helping people regain their independance and initiative.
Community activities

Centre staff work closely with local professionals - especially kindergartens, schools and hospitals - but also with non-governmental organisations and associations. The aim is to strengthen links within the community and encourage exchange.

1- Clubs for Senior citizens

*In some towns, over half of the population is elderly. The centres encourage senior citizens to pass on their knowledge of local history and traditions.*

2- Municipal meetings

*Centres can act as a half-way house where the community and local authorities resolve problems and discuss new ideas.*

3- Recreation

*Chess tournaments bridge the age gap and attract local interest.*

4- Festivals

*The centres recognise the importance of national festivals as a way to bring communities together.*

Taking stock

In March 1995 the staff from all nine Centres, national supervisors and co-ordinators, staff from the Kiev project office and from the UNESCO Chernobyl Programme secretariat in Paris, met at the Uzlovaya Community Development Centre, in the Russian Federation, for two weeks to take stock, exchange experiences and learn new skills.

The seminar was a rich experience. As a result, managers and staff clarified the aims of the project and decided to expand the range of services, in line with local needs.

The meeting also reinforced the need to enhance the network of communication between the Centres. Local community needs - as well as particular staff skills - have meant that each centre has its own personality - with its own expertise.

One Centre has special experience of children with radiation-induced illness, another with evacuees, while another uses desk-top publishing with teenagers to produce newsletters on ecology. Whenever possible, the Centres will be linked by electronic mail, so that staff can share experiences and resources more effectively.
What do they think about it?

“I’ve always known that we live in a contaminated zone here, but no-one was able to tell me what I could do to help myself. The only place where I’ve found help and answers to my questions is in this centre. The staff and workers have accepted me as a volunteer and think of me as a friend.”

V. Mazola, 10th form pupil at Borodyanka school N°2

“Adolescents come to use the computers, but they stay behind afterwards to talk about their problems”.

Sergei, social worker, Ivankiv, Ukraine

“It’s important just to have someone to listen to your story from beginning to end”.

Psychologist, Slavutych, Ukraine

“Some children come to the clinic seven or eight times. The Centre is like a home for them. They often send letters and postcards and phone us when they are away.”

Larissa, social worker, Aksakovshina, Belarus

“Some people were embarrassed to come here. They say: ‘It’s a small town, everyone knows me’. But now there are too many people asking to see a therapist”.

Elena, Manager, Utlovaya Centre, Russia

“My husband had a problem with alcohol for a long time. He kept changing jobs. Nobody wanted to employ him. I convinced him to visit the Centre and talk to a psychologist. To my surprise he started going to the Centre regularly. He met people with the same problems and realised he had to change his lifestyle.”

Wife of an alcoholic visitor
"I am retired. I am old. My children and relatives live far away. I felt lonely until I first visited the Community Centre. Now I have a place where I can come and meet different people. I can celebrate our traditional holidays with other people of my own age. I feel much happier."

**Pensioner**

"My husband and I were having serious difficulties in our marriage. We had a problem understanding each other and found it hard to say what we really felt. We came here for a number of consultations (separately at first, then together) and joined a group of couples with similar problems. We learned how to understand each other better and find easier to resolve our difficulties."

**Young couple**

"Two girls were talking some months ago and one said, 'are you going to the dance at the Centre?' The other said 'No; I'm not crazy!' Now they all come."

**Belarus National Supervisor**

"I was a patient in this building when it was a clinic. The decor was austere. I was surprised to see it again today as a UNESCO Centre, newly decorated, with children enjoying themselves, playing and watching t.v."

**Visitor, Ivankiv Centre**

"There is no infrastructure - just one school and a club in an old building in the suburbs miles away. This is why our Centre has become the main focus of cultural life here."

**Manager, Nikolskaya Sloboda Centre, Russia**

"A boy who used to be a good footballer lost his leg. His mother is an alcoholic. Another boy lost both legs in an accident. Through the Centre they became friends and help each other. They organised the music for a party and want to start a group. Their parents take part in support groups in the Centre."

**Social worker, Borodyanka Centre, Ukraine**
Where do we go from here?

The success of the Community Development Centres project (N° 64) has confirmed a number of needs that were identified in the three countries affected by the Chernobyl disaster:

- a need for support to enable the public to cope with the social and psychological consequences of the accident
- a need for guidance for local communities on how to take an active part in building a democratic society
- a need to establish or improve the range of national psychological and social services
- a need to improve national training courses in psychology and social work

Within this context, the project will now be focusing on several goals:

- **to consolidate the nine existing centres**
  - finish building the two Centres still working from temporary accommodation - Aksakovshyna (by June 1996) and Bolshov (during 1996)
  - deliver outstanding equipment - renew existing equipment (according to availability of funds)
  - evaluate existing operations, programmes, management and training needs
  - finalise plans for the development of each Centre

- **to provide information on how to live safely in a contaminated zone**
  - produce and distribute a booklet of source material: "Living with radiation after Chernobyl"
  - seminars for trainers on how to use the booklet
  - prepare information leaflets for specific risk groups (e.g., children, teenagers, young mothers, liquidators)
  - prepare a strategy to inform the public living in contaminated areas

- **to transfer expertise in psychology and social work to higher education institutions**
  - collate material on case studies and other activities with a view to their use in national training courses
  - review and consolidate existing materials for training of project staff
  - survey national professional training in psychology and social work to identify uses for the project's source materials

- **to extend the network of community development centres**

- **to increase the number of centres in the three countries concerned after discussions with the national authorities**
  - Belarus: build two centres, in Gomel and Mogilov; develop better contacts with the Gomel information centre.
  - Russia: UNESCO has agreed in principle to participate in opening a centre for liquidators in Moscow. Another centre should be opened in Gagarine (Smolensk oblast), where there are many liquidators and Chernobyl resettlers.
  - Ukraine: the new centres have not yet been identified.

- **to extend links between the Centres and other community-based institutions**
  - pilot projects are already underway with local hospitals and schools in Pershay and Strehyn (Belarus). In other areas, the accent is on creating employment and on co-operation with municipal structures.

- **to extend the role of the Centres and develop new activities in response to local needs and potential, including:**
  - information
  - training in leadership skills
  - set up local associations and clubs
  - co-operation with national and international associations
  - contribute to local job creation

- **to help improve social infrastructures and services - especially in new settlements built in the last ten years for Chernobyl victims**
How can you participate?

Given the present status of the project, as described in this brochure, the following sub-projects need to be supported. Anyone can participate in their implementation regardless of the form or importance of their contribution.

Support the existing Centres:

Sub-project n°1

Requirements:
For 9 centres: US$ 185,000 or per Centre: Russia 1,500/month/Centre; Ukraine and Belarus US$800/month/Centre. Financial contributions only.

Sub-project n°2
Support the coordination, supervision and training of Centre staff. From June 1996 until December 1997.

Requirements: US$250,000. Part of the resources necessary could be provided in expertise or materials (about US$50,000).

Sub-project n°3
Develop the libraries in the Centres. Increase the stock of books and subscriptions to professional journals in psychology, sociology and local development.

Requirements over two years: either donation of relevant publications and subscriptions to major journals, or financial donations: US$ 50,000 (estimated).

Sub-project n°4
Exchanges and scholarships. It is important for the Project specialists to be able to study similar services in other countries.

Requirements: 3 to 6 month scholarships for the professionals of the Centres to travel abroad. Exchange arrangements with national institutions can be considered.

Sub-project n°5
Consolidate the knowledge acquired and introduce this into the national psychology and sociology curricula; preparation of casework material.

Requirements:
for one year: US$ 100,000 Donations in the form of expertise could be possible.

Informing the population:

Sub-project n°6
Prepare and distribute a 32-48 page brochure designed to inform those who are affected by the Chernobyl accident about radiation, its impacts and about steps to be taken to avoid contamination.

Phase 1
The document is already being written and produced for limited distribution and testing. In 1996, it will be produced in large quantities for distribution to different 'information relays' (teachers, doctors, and other selected specialists).

Requirements: Phase 1 of this project is funded by Canada and The Netherlands.

Phase 2
Leaflets designed for specific target populations and dealing with specific priority problems will be prepared and produced. Initially distributed through the community development Centres and then nationally.

Requirements for 1996: at least US$ 200,000 depending on circulation. The production of additional communications materials, especially posters or slides, will be carried out depending on available funds.

A few pilot projects have been designed to extend the information service, currently carried out in the Centres, to schools and hospitals.
Sub-project n°7
Educating children about radiation.
This project aims to design teaching materials on ‘living with radiation’ for use in schools. It will build on the experience gained in the Community Development Centres.

Identification of needs, definition of possible actions to be undertaken in the context of the educational system: preparation of basic classroom materials. Production and dissemination, teacher training in cooperation with the national training institutions.

Status: the content material for this project has been collected.

■ Requirements:
  US$ 150,000 for development of teaching materials, testing and distribution.

Sub-project n°8
Co-operating with health authorities to allow local, regional and national hospitals to benefit from the public information experience, concerning radiation, developed in the Centres.

Consultations with the health ministries, identification of needs based on existing information materials in the community centres project, definition of possible actions to be undertaken; adapting existing materials to the specific needs of the health system.

Production, dissemination and training through the ministries of health.

■ Requirements:
  US$50,000 for the initial planning phase of the project.

Sub-project n°9
Co-operation with NGOs working in key areas for local development. This project seeks to encourage national and international NGOs to apply to work in the Centres on key community activities that are outside UNESCO’s areas of competence. The project will inform NGOs about the needs of each Centre and will draw up a co-operation agreement with those selected.

The project could offer a limited number of small grants to get initiatives started and to monitor progress.

■ Requirements:
  US$ 100,000.

Increase the number of Community Centres:

Sub-project n°10
Nine additional community centres in the three countries. UNESCO is requested to start building these new Centres in 1996, in order to extend the network to other areas in need. The list of Centres is available on request.

■ Requirements:
  Foreign contribution to create one Centre:
  US$ 125,000. Each Centre and its community could be twinned with a donor community.

The priorities and projects outlined above are either currently in progress or under development. All forms of participation in this international project are possible. Whether you are an individual, a private firm, a foundation, a bilateral cooperation agency or a multilateral organisation, you can co-operate in kind by giving either time - that is to say specific expertise -, or materials and funds.

Please call or write to the Programme Secretariat at the following address:

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Please do not hesitate to contact UNESCO to see how your requirements can fit into the framework of the Project.
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