



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Ladakh Ecological Development Group (India)

(1986)



...for preserving the traditional culture and values of Ladakh against the onslaught of tourism and development.

Retrofitting of houses using passive solar architecture

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Ladakh, or 'Little Tibet', is one of the last remaining traditional cultures on earth. For over a thousand years the Ladakhi people have prospered, creating a rich, harmonious and sustainable culture from the sparse resources of their region. In 1975, traditional self-confidence and pride were suddenly replaced by feelings of inferiority and dissatisfaction when the area was opened to tourism and 'development', which brought with them highly idealised impressions of life in the West. Outside economic pressures began undermining the local economy, and ills that were previously unknown - pollution, crime, unemployment, family breakdown and rapid urbanisation - began to take hold.

Helena Norberg-Hodge founded the Ladakh Project in 1978 as a way of countering these destructive trends. As an alternative to conventional development, the project has encouraged a path based on Ladakh's own values and its human-scale economy. Much of this work has involved 'counter-development', which involves informing people about the realities of Western consumer culture while working to restore respect for the local culture.

The Ladakh Project - now called the [International Society for Ecology and Culture \(ISEC\)](#) - then expanded its focus and works in both the North and South to encourage more decentralized land-based ways of living. Straddling theory and action, ISEC seeks to alert people to the threat economic globalisation poses to communities, democracy and the natural world, while also actively promoting economic localisation through international campaigns and grassroots initiatives such as community-supported agriculture, local currencies and eco-villages. ISEC's written and video materials, including *Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh* and *The Future of Progress*, have been translated into over 25 languages, demonstrating that this message strikes a chord with people around the world.

With the Ladakh Project's active participation, the indigenous Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDEG) was founded in 1983 with the goal of ensuring that the Ladakhis themselves would be able to shape their future, one built on Ladakh's own resources and ancient foundations. LEDEG has promoted local manufacturing technologies that use solar energy for space heating, cooking, water heating, crop drying and greenhouses, and small-scale water power for grinding grain, producing electricity and pumping water. Today, one or more of these technologies can be found in virtually every Ladakhi village.

Now an influential NGO, the respect that LEDEG is accorded was demonstrated when its two

co-directors were elected to high positions in Ladakh's new, semi-autonomous government.

Important developments for LEDEG in the new millennium include the large-scale dissemination of new technologies like parabolic dish cookers and photovoltaics, the building-up of an own fund to become more independent from donors and the introduction of ecotourism and biodiversity programmes.

Quotation

"Throughout the world today there is a growing awareness of the failings of the Western model of development and a corresponding desire to look for more human-scale, ecological ways of living. If Ladakh now succeeds in creating for itself a future which retains the foundations of its traditional past, it will be an inspiring example of how all the various elements of an ecological future fit together."

Helena Norberg-Hodge

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