

The Slawson Award

**Royal
Geographical
Society**
with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning

Alexandra Conliffe

Education

- BEng (Mechanical), McGill University (2004)
- MSc in Environmental Change and Management, University of Oxford (2005)
- DPhil in Geography, University of Oxford (2009)

- **Current position**

International Institute for Sustainable Development

Slawson Award

Alex received the Slawson award in 2006 to conduct field research for her doctorate, ***The Combined Impacts of Political and Environmental Change on Rural Livelihoods in the Aral Sea Region of Uzbekistan.***



The Aral Sea region is one of the world's largest environmental crisis zones; under the Soviet regime, the desert became an extensive cotton field leading to extensive land degradation. Conditions are expected to worsen under future climate change scenarios. Additionally, the rural population is negotiating the collapse of the Former Soviet Union and the gradual privatization of the farming system.

Alex's research investigated the resources that households access to build their lives, questions why access is differentiated, and explores how households use their assets to build livelihoods and with what outcomes. She found highly differentiated access to natural resources – soil and water – even at the micro scale, and links the ability to grow certain crops to the non-farming livelihood activities, particularly seasonal migration, in which households engage.

In a larger context, the research also examined current global approaches to adaptation to climate change and questions whether these can address local-level needs in former Soviet contexts where constraints and interpretations of "sustainable development" differ significantly from those understood elsewhere.

Since the Slawson Award

Alex Conliffe completed her doctorate in January 2010. She continues to work for the International Institute for Sustainable Development, for whom she reports at international environmental negotiations, including those related to climate change and desertification.

Alex was thrilled to win the Slawson award, which not only facilitated her 9 months of field research in Uzbekistan, but allowed her to be part of the complicated world of rural Uzbekistan for a time. Fascinated in particular by the women she met while there, Alex hopes to turn her attention to writing about some of the people who most influenced her during her research as part of the "other thesis" that emerges from conducting field research.