

Participation of Local Communities Modeling in the Revival of Lake Urmia through the Establishment of Sustainable Agriculture

This documentary is an attempt to document measures, systematically, taken by the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project (CIWP) in line with the implementation of sustainable agriculture with the participation of local communities. The main purpose of the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project is the transition from the "traditional conservation approach" to a modern approach e.g., ecological approach and the subject "conservation", in this way, will have a transition from wetland level to "drainage basin" level.

The concept of "participation", especially "participation of local communities" enjoys a broad history and conceptual diversity. In fact, "collaborative action *and learning*" is one of the approaches.

In this approach, continuous engagement and intervention of all stakeholders in the process of problem discovering, planning, executing, and evaluating are emphasized. Today, scholars are unable to manage agriculture complications and sustainability without interaction and cooperation with "farmers" and the farmers must participate from the very beginning of agriculture research and development and continue their presence.

In fact, the collaborative approach consists of methods that combine actions, thoughts, collaborations, and researches in different ways. This method provides educational and interactional stream between the scholars and participants to exchange thoughts and knowledge and, eventually, will result in measures that can be beneficial for the participants.

Measures of this project resulted in the gathering of organizations and institutions together for the revival of "Lake Urmia" and they took constructive measures in the field of sustainable agriculture based on the ecological approach with their participation and empathy. The Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project (CIWP) designed and executed their actions not only with their colleagues and organizational counterparts in the provinces but also with other associate bodies and ministries.

The phrase "sustainable agriculture" is defined as the use of a comprehensive system for the production of plant and livestock in a way that:

- 1- Firstly, provides food security to human communities in the long-term

- 2- Secondly, improves the quality of the natural environment considering economics in the agriculture sector
- 3- Thirdly, has the most efficient use of non-renewable and in-farm resources and, at the same time, considers controlling biological cycles and economic continuity of farm activities
- 4- And finally, improves the lives of farmers and the community, in general.

In sustainable agriculture, there is decentralization while conventional agriculture activities are centralized. Sustainable agriculture is not dependent on external resources, however, conventional agriculture is completely dependent. Cooperation and collaboration can be seen in sustainable agriculture while competition exists in conventional agriculture. In sustainable agriculture, variety in cultivation is considered while professional cultivation and specialization is part of the agenda in conventional agriculture.

Considering the general purposes of the concept "sustainable agriculture", we can divide the results of using the concept in the project "collaboration for the revival of Lake Urmia through the participation of local communities in the establishment of sustainable agriculture and conservation of biodiversity" into three general categories: "improvement in the environmental conditions", "improvement in the social conditions", and "improvement in the economical conditions".

In fact, the "ecological approach" is a strategy for the integrated management of water resources, lands, and living that expands the conservation, and sustainable use in a balanced manner. This approach is also applied as an approach to actions in the field of "sustainable agriculture".

Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project (CIWP) has attempted to introduce an ecological approach as a basis for the establishment of a novel and comprehensive style of management to deploy sustainable agricultural management in line with the conservation of the country wetlands.

Systematic preparation and development of basic studies are considered as one of the crucial achievements of the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project that provide the essential fields for the exact and fact-based planning. Also, the selection of pilot villages for executing the plan "collaboration for the revival of Lake Urmia through the participation of local communities in the establishment of sustainable agriculture and conservation of biodiversity" was an experience that took place, collaboratively, in a systematic mechanism and purposeful manner. A set of capacity-building measures for the collaborative approach commenced with the transfer of these concepts

to the various management level (senior and middle-level managers), experts, and locals and continued to a set of executive measures in the field of capacity building.

Some of the advantages and achievements of this plan are as follows:

- ✓ To strength intersectoral collaborations
- ✓ To attract farmers' participation
- ✓ To improve the implementation of the management model in the farm
- ✓ Organizational solidarity
- ✓ To utilize the knowledge and expertise of the research center through funds' allocation for this project

One of the important effects of this project was that farmers' arrival to work was because of the lake, people being aware and sensitive, and feeling sympathy. All of these projects affected people's minds. The farmer that understand the importance of the lake was the main purpose of the project. If they became aware, there will be no need for us to search. I have a busy schedule, however, I devoted half of my business time for the project, currently. I have a good feeling about this project, won't stop, and continue until having an answer to all of our actions. Farmers will become aware, water consumption will decline and they will seek to revive the lake, on their own.