



Conservation of Iranian
Wetlands Project

Success Story

Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project



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Foreword

Working with numerous governmental and non-governmental institutions, and funded by the Global Environment Facility and the United Nations Development Programme, the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands project has helped create a model of integrated ecological management to preserve some of Iran's most precious environmental resources. Initially based on the three pilot sites of Lake Urumieh Basin, Lake Parishan and Shadegan wetland, the multi-stakeholder management plan devised for these wetlands is to be rolled out to another 50 wetlands across the country.

Begun in 2005, the project is now in its eighth and final year. It has succeeded in leveraging important governmental and civil society involvement for the management of wetlands, and mobilized over 2 trillion Iranian Rials (IRR) in national budget allocations for ecosystem management.

Beyond its considerable institutional achievements at national, provincial and local levels, the project has supported some highly productive micro-initiatives in villages and communities surrounding wetlands to ease pressure on water resources. These include sustainable farming activities and village-led efforts for species conservation. It is through these initiatives that the wetlands project has successfully broadened the participation of women in community affairs and developed the capacity of locally-based non-governmental organizations to be part of the wetlands management process. In addition, the project has helped establish water rights due to Lake Urumieh by its surrounding provinces.

Over the course of its eight years, the project has created solid institutional bases and secured significant political and financial commitments from the Iranian government to ensure that its achievements will be consolidated even after the project's close at the end of 2012. In the future, maintaining these commitments will be vital to better preserving Iran's rich biodiversity and the fragile livelihoods of wetland communities.

In the following report, UNDP has sought to document the transformational changes produced by this successful project, focusing on participatory processes, civil society engagement and leveraging national involvement.

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Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project

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Introduction

Context

Wetlands are among the most important ecosystems on the planet and are invaluable centers of biodiversity and human livelihoods. Thanks to Iran's varied climate systems and topography, the country is home to very diverse wetlands such as coral reefs, mangrove forests, salty lakes and lowland marshes – most of which are under severe threat.

The persistent drought affecting Iran – whose territory is mostly arid or semi-arid - over the course of the past ten years, has drastically depleted wetland environments. Competition for use of water resources; agricultural and industrial pollution; and lack of resilient management systems has compounded damage to these environments.

About the Project

The Conservation of Iranian Wetlands project, initiated in 2005 by Iran's Department of Environment, the United Nations Development Programme and the Global Environment Facility, aims to mitigate the threats to biodiversity and environmental sustainability faced by Iranian wetlands by creating a national wetlands management system piloted in three demonstration sites. By managing these risks, the project also supports Iran in meeting its international commitments under the Ramsar Convention on wetlands (signed in 1971).

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Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project		
Partners: Implementing: Department of Environment & UNDP (GEF Implementing Agency)		
Involved: Government: Ministries of Agriculture, Interior, Foreign Affairs, Energy & Transportation (national, provincial and local); President's Deputy in the Strategic Planning and Control Authority; Provincial Water Authorities, Tourism & Natural Resources Organization, Fisheries Department, Universities.		
Non-governmental organizations: 13 Farvardin, Salamat (Kazeroon), Plan for the land, Damoon, Tabiat (Kazeroon), Hamyaranzistsabz (Tabriz), Naghade&Mahabad environment cooperatives, Women's society against environmental pollution (Ahwaz)		
Pilot sites Lake Urumieh Basin (West& EastAzerbaijan, Kordestan) Lake Parishan (Fars Province) ShadeganWetland (Kouzeestan Province)		
Funding		
Government of Iran (Dept of Environment)	Global EnvironmentFacility	United Nations Development Programme Iran
US\$9,190,000	US\$9,190,000	US\$200,000

Transformational Change

The project has helped develop integrated plans for managing wetlands in the three pilot sites of Lake Urmieh (north-western Iran – provinces of East & West Azerbaijan, Kordestan), Shadegan Wetland (south-western Iran – Khouzeestan province) and Lake Parishan (southern Iran, Fars province) through a highly participatory process, drawing inputs from national, provincial, local and community levels.



The multi-stakeholder nature of the plan is based on the “ecosystem approach,” an advanced practice of environmental conservation, and reflects the numerous authorities and communities who need to be involved for the coordinated management of Iran’s fragile wetlands. Thanks to the introduction

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of this approach, numerous new stakeholders are now formally engaged in wetland management, whereas previously, this responsibility was held solely by the Department of Environment. In addition, the focus of wetland management now extends beyond wetlands themselves, out to the entire river basins on which they depend.

This durable change towards participatory policy development and administrative structures for managing wetland ecosystems has helped organize local communities and make them more aware of the significance of wetlands for their livelihoods. Villagers living around demonstration sites are now active participants in efforts to preserve their ecosystem, such as sustainable agriculture activities, developing alternative, non-water dependent livelihoods, and species conservation, which are all supported by the project.

Awareness raised by the project has given a renewed political salience to the issue of wetlands conservation at the highest level of the state. Ecosystem preservation is also enshrined in Iran's Fifth National Development Plan (2011-2015). The management of Lake Urumieh – Iran's largest lake located in one of the country's most economically dynamic regions – carried out by the Lake Urumieh Executive Management Committee, is headed by Iran's Vice President and counts among its members the Deputy President of Strategic Planning and Control, the Governors of all three bordering provinces (East & West Azerbaijan, Kordestan) and the Ministers of Energy, Agriculture Jihad, the Interior and Road & Urban Development. The Head of the Department of Environment serves as the Committee Secretariat.

The wetlands conservation project has been instrumental in leveraging large national budgets for this important issue in Iran's environmental and, ultimately, economic affairs.

Transformational Change

- ☑ Strengthened governance mechanisms at national, provincial, local and community levels,
- ☑ Established acceptance of participatory methods,
- ☑ Established wetlands as a national priority issue,
- ☑ Improved women's involvement in community affairs,
- ☑ Strengthened capacity of civil society organizations,
- ☑ Institutionalized awareness about threats to Iran's wetlands and wise use.

The following pages detail the lasting transformational change produced by the project in terms of integrating the efforts of multiple stakeholders, easing pressure on water resources and biodiversity, and leveraging broader political and financial involvement for the conservation of Iranian wetlands.

Integrated Efforts: the Ecosystem Approach



Integrated Efforts: the Ecosystem Approach

The Ecosystem Approach

In contrast to previous methods of environmental management systems focused mainly on conservation with little to no use of natural resources, the “ecosystem approach”, introduced by the project, allows for calculated and rational use of wetland resources to meet the economic needs of human societies living around them. Other benefits of this approach include taking into account functional (urbanization, industrial development/waste, cultural considerations etc) or physical areas beyond the boundaries of the wetland itself, to manage the ecosystem more comprehensively and sustainably. “Working with UNDP as the implementing agency, the international knowledge provided by the project has been helpful to introduce new frameworks,” says Ms. Mehri Asna-Ashari, Public Awareness and Communications Coordinator for the wetlands conservation project at the Department of Environment, “it has paved the way to using more effective models for ecosystem management in Iran.”

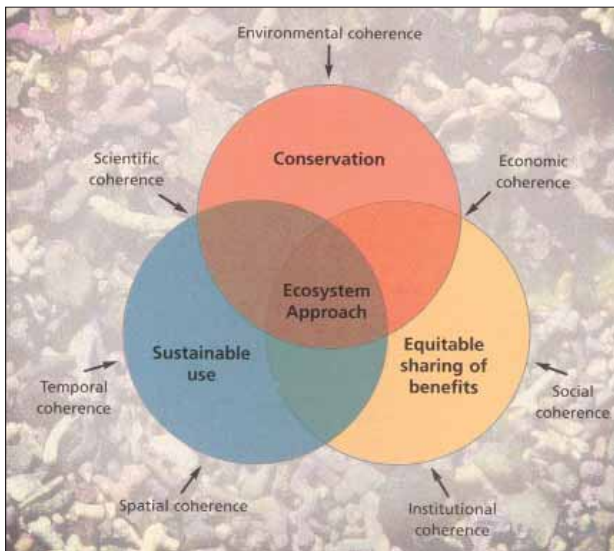


Diagram of the Ecosystem Approach

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Because of its broad conceptual basis, the ecosystem approach adopted by the project supports the case for wetland management by a wide range of organizations, each involved in separate but related areas relevant to the conservation of this precious natural resource. To reflect the priorities and responsibilities of the multiple stakeholders involved, the project drew on an intensely participatory process for developing and implementing the wetlands management plan for its three pilot sites. As a highly centralized country, this type of participatory approach was not at all commonplace in Iran previous to the project's implementation. The wetlands conservation project has provided a successful model to transform the institutional basis for environmental management in the country.

Participatory Development & Implementation of the Wetlands Integrated Management Plan

The participatory process for developing the integrated management lasted over two years and drew on inputs from dozens of organizations from national, provincial, local and community levels. Beyond the Department of Environment, participating institutions at the national level include: the Ministries of Interior, Energy, Foreign Affairs, Agriculture Jihad, Roads & Urban Development; the Deputy President for Strategic Planning and Control, the Department of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, Provincial Water Authorities, the Natural Resources Organization and the Fisheries Department. The development of the integrated wetlands management plan brought together representatives of each of these institutions at the provincial and local levels, as well as the Governors of each pilot site province.



The participatory planning process was also instrumental in involving civil society organizations, mainly at the community level. The project worked with over 10 non-governmental organizations and 12 community-based organizations.¹ By providing opportunities for development and growth, continuously including these organizations throughout the project's life cycle, has leveraged civil society capacity.



¹ Conservation of Iranian Wetlands, Annual Report 2011, UNDP, GEF and Dept of Environment March 2012

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“Involving civil society organizations was a significant challenge at first, since few had sufficient capacity to manage the responsibilities entrusted to them by the project. But over the years, they have become capable and trusted partners for implementing this much needed wetlands management plan, especially because of their role in reaching out to local communities – those most affected by the depletion of wetlands which they depend on so much for their livelihoods. In fact, NGOs and community organizations will be the key to sustaining much of the project’s achievements when it comes to an end,” explains Dr. Ali Nazaridoust, former National Project Manager at the Department of Environment since 2007 and current Programme Analyst in UNDP-Iran’s Energy, Environment and Disaster Risk Management Unit.

Local communities: building capacity and involving women

Capacity development activities were necessary to involve communities meaningfully in the integrated management of wetland pilot sites. Two, four-day training workshops were held in 2010 for approximately 30 representatives of NGOs and community based organizations (CBO) to enhance their aptitude for organizing their respective communities more effectively. The aim of these workshops was to mobilize local villagers to take the care of wetlands into their own hands. The workshops’ activities focused specifically on improving teamwork, NGO and CBO administration, proposal development and project implementation.



“Thanks to the training courses provided by the wetland conservation project, our NGO has learned how to work with other organizations and how to submit funding proposals. We are aware that the project will come to an end soon – we need to find alternative sources of support to continue our important efforts towards preserving the wetland. Our application to UNDP’s Small Grants Programme (SGP) has been submitted and is currently being vetted,” details Ms. Keshavarz of the NGO *Tabiat & Salamat* (“nature and health”) active around the lake Parishan pilot site.

Local community representatives are now members of wetland management committees. As a result, today, communities have an active role in managing the wetland: “Previously, people living around the lake weren’t even invited to participate in discussions about their environment. Now they are and have strong opinions to express. Local communities have become unavoidable participants in the decision-making process,” adds Mr. Khodaparast, Head of the Kazeroon Office of the Department of Environment.

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The project has also reached out specifically to local women in an effort to support a broader role for them in their respective communities and produce durable transformational change. One example of this assistance for women is the “Female Sustainable Agriculture Facilitator Group” run by female representatives of eleven villages around Parishan wetland. These women have received training on sustainable agriculture techniques which they are responsible for relaying to their villages. A micro-credit fund was also created with project money for their use. Participating women have supplemented the fund with their own savings and are beginning to draw on it for the purchase of small farming equipment for additional income generation such as egg incubators.

In addition, the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands project developed management plans for two Lake Urumieh satellite wetlands, Gorigol and Gharegheshlagh in East Azerbaijan, by strengthening capacities of local authorities and communities. The project managed the process directly in Gorigol, but in Gharegheshlagh it was transferred to an NGO, Damoon, for capacity building purposes. Comprehensive field research was initially conducted by Damoon around Gharegheshlagh wetland. Local capacity for management planning processes was then built by identifying wetland

threats, problems, affecting stakeholders, objectives and several participatory workshops.



Spreading Wetland Values



Spreading Wetland Values

Raising awareness

One of the most significant transformational changes induced by the conservation project is the awareness it raised among surrounding communities, local, provincial and national authorities and the general public about the importance of preserving the wetland. Meetings and training sessions held with local communities offered important opportunities to inform participants about threats to the wetland such as agricultural overuse, pollution and illegal well digging. The participation of communities in local management committees - set up as part of the integrated management plan - also leveraged a stronger understanding of the vital importance of preserving wetlands.



A series of radio and television shows were produced about the threats to Lake Urumieh and its surrounding wetlands, which were broadcast across Eastern and Western Azerbaijan provinces. Project staff members were also regularly invited to participate in TV and radio shows on environmental issues, offering significant opportunities to inform wetland communities and the general public about the urgent need to prevent further degradation of wetlands.

“The project has sensitized women, children and farmers to understand the worth of the wetlands for their livelihoods. Training sessions, local committee meetings and public outreach efforts such as exhibits and media programmes have truly driven home the point: we must take care of our environment before

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it is too late,” reveals Ms. Abbaspour of the Fars province Ham Andishan e Javan NGO.



Raising awareness among local communities and governmental institutions has been a catalyst for transformational change in the wetland’s management. The project has helped communities and authorities understand the urgency of preserving an ecosystem vital to local livelihoods and biodiversity, while creating momentum for durable change.

Local communities living around the pilot sites are overwhelmingly involved in farming. Lacking skills and opportunities for other, less environmentally damaging income-generating activities, significant project-supported outreach was necessary to steer farming communities towards alternative solutions for their livelihoods. Evolving national governmental involvement in managing wetlands will be covered in a later section.

Developing alternative livelihoods for sustainable water use

“Besides farming, there are precious few job opportunities in the areas surrounding wetlands,” explains Mr. Kazemeyn from the *13 Farvardin* NGO (the 13th day of the Iranian month of *Farvardin* is national Nature Day). “In addition, people lack the skills to involve themselves in any other areas of work. This is a very big problem, particularly in drought years: as the population growth of villages around the wetlands continues, individual family farm size

is increasing rapidly. That means more use of water resources and even faster evaporation of what is left of the wetland, which speeds up as water levels decrease,” he continues.

The conservation of Iranian wetlands project has sought to address this issue with several community-level projects aimed at diminishing pressure on the environmental resource base. These efforts include developing alternative, non-water dependent livelihoods, as well as adopting more sustainable agricultural techniques.

Sustainable agriculture projects around Lake Urumieh and Parishan Wetland have drawn on local farming skills while injecting new, more sustainable techniques which use less water, control evaporation and increase yields significantly (see the *Success Story* in the next section). These pilot projects around Lake Parishan and in the Gorigol & Sirangoli satellite wetlands around Lake Urumieh, are steadily involving more and more farmers each season. Thanks to demonstration sites for sustainable farming techniques set-up by the local outpost of the Ministry of Jihad Agriculture, using seed money from the wetlands project, farmers learn more environmentally – and ultimately, economically – wise methods for growing their crops. Beyond production, farmers are now looking to optimize marketing their crops in order to make their income more predictable.

The wetlands project has associated a group of women facilitators to the sustainable agriculture initiative around Lake Parishan. The group is constituted of 11 female representatives from villages around the lake who participate in trainings for sustainable agriculture and share their newly acquired skills with their respective communities. This initiative has put women, who traditionally do not have a full-fledged role in community affairs, at the heart of their villages’ livelihood and of efforts to sustain the wetland.

The women facilitator group has also received seed money from the conservation project to create a micro-credit fund (20 million IRR), which members supplemented with their own income. With these funds, women were able to purchase machines necessary for non-water dependent income-generating activity such as egg incubators to raise chickens and sell fresh

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eggs. The group has also supported women in their respective communities to develop alternative income sources such as producing natural fertilizer (compost), which is now sold to farming communities around the wetland.



In an effort to endow villagers with sufficient skills to make a living without depleting their natural resource base through agriculture, the project has trained volunteers as local eco-tour travel guides to help visitors discover Lake Parishan's natural beauty. 17 people were trained under this scheme in 2008 & 2010, 11 of which obtained a formal state license. They now have an alternative livelihood as tour guides, particularly in the busy *Nowrooz* period (Persian New Year), when up to 500 visitors a day come to Lake Parishan. A visitor center was also built near the wetland to accommodate travelers during their visits. "This initiative has the double benefit of easing pressure on the wetland and of broadening awareness about threats to it to visitors from around the country. While villagers are the main actors for helping people understand the value of their wetland, ultimately, its preservation is everybody's responsibility," explains Ali Arvahi, Technical Assistant for the Wetlands project in the Department of Environment.

Conservation

Wetlands are home to rich biodiversity, which is now threatened by lack of

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rainfall, unsustainable use of water and increased water salinity. Consequently, the wetlands conservation project has taken action to preserve endangered animal species whose habitat has, in some places, been so drastically altered that it has become inhospitable to many bird, fish and mammal species that normally call the wetland home.



“Some fish species had all but disappeared from the project’s pilot sites. Thankfully, we have taken action to save them by creating several conservation ponds beside the wetlands to ensure their survival through periods of drought,” details Mr. Yaghoobalipour of the Fisheries Organization.



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The project has also turned to local communities to support the conservation of otters that live in the wetland. Over 100 students, teachers, environmental guards and local villagers were trained to monitor this small mammal whose population has receded rapidly. They were also involved in developing a conservation plan for this important species.

Sustainable Agriculture Around Lake Parishan



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Sustainable Agriculture Around Lake Parishan

a success story

“Less water, more yields!” exclaims Mohammad Sharifi Moghaddam, a wetlands conservation project consultant and instructor for the sustainable agriculture initiative around Lake Parishan near the main South Western Iranian city of Shiraz. Most families living in the villages surrounding the wetland have been involved in farming for generations. Today, as family and plot sizes expand, rainfall decreases and water overuse has become ubiquitous, farming has become much more challenging – and more of a threat to the environment.



Thanks to the plan-based outreach activities of the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands project conducted by the Departments of Environment and Agriculture, the United Nations Development Programme and the Global Environment Facility, villagers around Lake Parishan and the project’s two other pilot sites are now acutely aware that preserving the wetland means more than saving the environment. In the long term, it means saving their economic livelihood.

“We have adopted new water management techniques to help us use water more efficiently, and consequently, preserve the wetland. These, combined with simple agricultural methods such as composting and not tilling the soil have boosted our crop yields,” he continues.

The sustainable agriculture project around Lake Parishan began in 2010, bringing together 25 farmers from Ghaleh Narengi village around the wetland. In its second year, 38 volunteers now participate in this promising initiative. A field farm school was set up as a demonstration site for nine different agricultural and water management techniques. Participating farmers work on the pilot site and replicate these sustainable methods in their own farms.

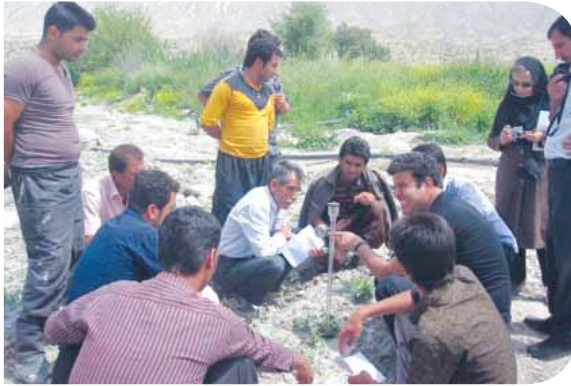


The field farm school includes both theoretical classes and practical demonstrations for drip, pressure and canal irrigation, covering soil with plastic sheeting to reduce evaporation, no soil tillage, non-chemical composting and alternative crop selection. These techniques offer an important alternative to traditional flood irrigation and the use of chemical fertilizer, which both use vast amounts of water. Locally made compost requires nearly two times less irrigation than chemical fertilizers used around the wetland.

Using flood irrigation, uncovered crops and tilled soil, farms need to be irrigated for entire days at a time. With the sustainable techniques introduced by the project, crops need only 5 hours of water. More specifically, previous to the introduction of these sustainable methods, 10,400m³ of water were necessary to quench 1 hectare of land. Now, sustainably farmed plots need only 6,000m³ of water, saving 4,400m³ of the region's most precious resource.

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These techniques are not only useful for the environment, they have also increased yields remarkably. The average yield for 1 hectare around the wetland of land is 70 tonnes. Using sustainable agriculture techniques, average yields are 148 tonnes per hectare for common crops such as tomatoes or watermelons.

“While it is of immense benefit to the wetland, ultimately, the project speaks to farmers in the language of money. It makes business sense for them to work more sustainably: their risk margin is small, so are their plots. They need the field farm school to demonstrate that these techniques will actually work for them before adopting them on their own farms. This pilot has more and more participants for a simple reason: sound environmental management means better business opportunities now and in the future,” explains Mr. Ali Reza Cheraqui, Coordinator of the Sustainable Agriculture Project and Expert in Kazeroon’s Department of Agriculture.

“The project draws on a participatory model, inviting farmers to learn about sustainable techniques, then replicate them on their own plots. At first, neither farmers nor the Ministry of Agriculture was acquainted with this kind of approach, so it took some work to implement, but now, the results speak for themselves and exceed our expectations by far,” he adds.

In an effort to expand the adoption of sustainable farming techniques further, and to involve women more in community development, the project has also formed a group of 11 women facilitators from villages around the wetland.

These women learn about new techniques and extend their use in their own communities. The group has also constituted a micro-credit fund with seed money from the wetlands conservation project (20 million IRR) and with their own savings to purchase the equipment necessary, such as egg incubators, to develop alternative livelihoods and to produce and sell natural compost used on sustainable farms.

The sustainable farming initiative around Lake Parishan has been so successful that it has already been replicated around the Lake Urumieh Basin, and leveraged funding from government. 5 billion Rials (IRR) have been earmarked from national budgets to reproduce the project elsewhere in Fars province and beyond. “In the future, continued governmental support will be vital to adopting sustainable techniques around Iran. Farming communities are resilient, but they need strong support to diminish the risks involved in changing their methods,” concludes Mr. Sharifi Mogaddam, “I am very confident about what lies ahead.”

Leveraging Broader Governmental Involvement



Leveraging Broader Governmental Involvement

National Authorities

By reaching out to all political levels and communities involved in preserving wetlands, the integrated management plan developed as part of the project has succeeded in making wetlands an issue of national priority in Iran. Thanks to the transformational change leveraged by the project, the wetlands are now managed at the highest levels of the state and well financed by national budget allocations.

The national committee for the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project will be chaired by the Deputy President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and bring together the Ministers of Energy, Agriculture and Interior. The committee's secretariat is to be held by the Head of the Department of the Environment. A National Wetlands Strategy and Action Plan, proposing the establishment of this national committee was recently submitted to Cabinet and is awaiting approval. This high-level involvement leveraged by the project will ensure that the issue of wetland conservation remains a national priority.

The project has included some highly productive outreach to parliamentarians and to executive government authorities to endorse the political commitments discussed above with financial backing. Indeed, Iran's 5th National Development Programme (2011-2015) allocates 175 billion Toman (1.75 trillion IRR) to the "Ecosystem Management of Iranian Wetlands" which supplements financial resources for wetlands conservation projects based on the ecosystem approach. The national government has also approved a fund for water resource management for wetlands out of its emergency budget worth 90 billion Toman (9 trillion IRR).

Institutions of Higher Learning

Since 2010, the wetlands conservation project has been working with the University of Environment in Iran. This cooperation, anchored by a memorandum of understanding (MoU) and a series of seminars, has helped the Department of Environment institutionalize the ecosystem approach

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used for the development of the wetlands management plan. The University of Environment is also instrumental in teaching the lessons learned from implementing this approach among students, professors and in professional development networks.

Drought Risk Management

In response to the severe drought affecting Lake Urumieh, the project, with the support of Tarbiat Modarres University, initiated a drought risk management programme for its surrounding wetlands in 2009 based on a participatory approach. The plan's development also drew on an international workshop, with participation from various Mediterranean countries facing similar problems as Iran, and Australia. Its main focus was on establishing the water rights "due" to Lake Urumieh by each of its surrounding provinces during droughts. The plan also includes provisions on how to intelligently optimize water consumption reduction (crop substitution, irrigation & crop size limitations, etc) and how to enforce water rights legally.





The drought risk management plan is to be implemented by Lake Urumieh Regional Management Council's Water and Agriculture working group, which includes Deputy Provincial Governors, and the Director Generals of the Environment, Water, Agriculture, Meteorological and Natural Resources Authorities for the provinces surrounding Lake Urumieh.

Lake Urumieh Drought Risk Management Project for Sustainable Livelihoods, Biodiversity and Microclimate Management Project

2010-2012

US\$ 200,000 (UNDP TRAC Funding)

Enabling legal frameworks

The Wetlands project has supported Iranian authorities in devising enabling legal frameworks to promote conservation. Beyond the provisions contained in the Fifth National Development Plan, one crucial step has been defining Lake Urumieh's legal water rights from its three surrounding provinces and enshrining them in a final, binding agreement now approved by the Lake's National Executive Committee. Another very significant achievement is the development of the National Wetlands Strategy and Action Plan, a regulation

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strategy driving the next twenty-five years of wetlands management in Iran. This document has been submitted to the Cabinet and is currently awaiting approval. The project team has been working with the Iranian Parliament to produce a law reflecting water rights around Lake Urumieh and other wetlands. Other milestones include, for Shadegan Wetland, the development of zoning maps and a code of practice; and for Parishan Wetland, the mapping of conflict zones (over land use) and the regularization of land titles.

Conclusion

Achievements

Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the wetlands conservation project team at all levels of the Department of Environment, in UNDP and in local communities, the project has succeeded in producing lasting transformational change for the integrated management of Iranian wetlands. In doing so, the project has leveraged the capacity and cooperation of national governmental authorities and civil society organizations. At a time of rapidly receding water levels, the project has protected indigenous animal species from possible extinction and helped surrounding communities develop more sustainable income-earning opportunities.

Achievements

- Develop an integrated wetlands & drought risk management plan using a highly participatory approach,
- Develop a toolkit to apply lessons learned to other wetlands,
- Establish water rights among provinces surrounding Lake Urumieh basin as a model for replication,
- Raise awareness among local communities and national authorities,
- Strengthen civil society organizations,
- Include local community representatives in management committees,
- Involve women in community efforts,
- Develop more sustainable livelihoods for villagers around wetlands, Conserve indigenous animal species.

National Replication and South-South Cooperation

The involvement of national authorities generated by the wetlands project extends beyond securing considerable governmental budgets to further efforts deployed in project sites. The National Wetlands Strategy & Action Plan, developed with the core support of the project, is now awaiting approval in Cabinet. A new national five year programme provides for the replication of the integrated management plan in 50 of Iran's wetlands. The project team is

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currently developing an eight-section toolkit to support replication in other parts of Iran. The project has also led to a clear recognition, reflected in National Development Plans and policies, of the worth of a participatory approach to planning.



South-South cooperation is an important part both of Iran's development policy and of UNDP's work in the country. Consequently, the project has reached out to international partners to share its experiences and gain from those of others. Project staff participated in the Ramsar Convention Asia Regional pre-COP 11 meeting in Indonesia, attended by Ramsar Convention member countries, international NGOs and university delegates, to share plans for Urumieh Basin. Other international outreach efforts include a study visit to the wetlands project pilot sites from a Pakistani delegation, including governmental experts and managers working on similar projects in their country. Project staff members also participate regularly in meetings with their counterparts in neighboring countries to foster a regional community of practice for wetland conservation managers. As part of this community, Nepal will be hosting the next Wetlands symposium in the second half of 2012.



Lessons learned

Overall, the project has been highly effective in reaching its stated objectives of developing an integrated management plan for three pilot wetlands in Iran. Nonetheless, very significant challenges remain for the conservation of these areas, particularly for the establishment of water rights. It is important to take stock of crucial lessons learned over the course of the project's implementation. They include:

- ☑ Efforts at raising awareness among local communities are essential to teaching villagers – those most exposed to environmental risks – the importance of preserving the wetlands. These efforts, and those aimed at developing alternative livelihoods for farmers, are, on their own, insufficient to create a viable economic incentive for communities to fundamentally eradicate environmentally damaging practices from the conduct of their daily lives.
- ☑ Developing plans using participatory methods in Iran are not commonplace and require considerable amounts of time. Hence, the actual implementation of activities begun rather late in the project's life cycle. Earlier implementation would have been more beneficial by generating results sooner and producing greater buy-in from various stakeholders.
- ☑ Sub-projects such as the sustainable agriculture initiative and the women's facilitator group around Lake Parishan have been highly successful. Moving

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forward, the project will promote similar initiatives more vigorously.

☑ The project faced some moderate challenges in institutionalizing national budget allocations for the management plans dedicated to each pilot site. Now that this issue has been solved, it is vital to ensure that these budget allocations persist in the future, once the project draws to a close.

The Conservation of Iranian Wetlands project has leveraged durable transformational changes in governance and civil society engagement that will help its important achievements endure when it draws to a close at the end of 2012.