



Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project

MID-TERM EVALUATION

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Acronyms and abbreviations

APR	Annual Project Report
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CIWP	Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project
DoE	Department of Environment
EC-IIP	Environment Component – Irrigation Improvement Project
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EHC	High Council on Environmental Conservation
FAO	Food & Agriculture Organization
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographic Information System
GO	Government organisation
Gol	Government of Iran
IBA	Important Bird Area
IFP	Institutional Focal Point
IIP	Irrigation Improvement Project
IUCN	World Conservation Union
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
km	kilometre
LF	Logical Framework
LP	Lake Parishan
LUB	Lake Uromiyeh Basin
LUBMA	Lake Uromiyeh Basin Management Authority
LUEZ	Lake Uromiyeh Ecological Zone
m	million
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MAJ	Ministry of Agricultural Jihad
MRT	Ministry of Roads and Transportation
MTE	Mid-Term Evaluation
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NEX	National Execution
NGO	Non-government organisation
NDP	National Development Plan
NP	National Park
NPD	National Project Director
NPM	National Project Manager
NRM	Natural resources management
PA	Protected Area
PCC	Project Coordination Committee
PCO	Project Central Office
PD	Project Document
PDF	Project Development Facility
PIR	Project Implementation Review
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PSC	Project Steering Committee
R&D	Research & development
SEA	Strategic Environment Assessment
SSA	Special Service Agreement
STAP	Scientific & Technical Advisory Panel
TC	Technical Committee
TPR	Tri-Partite Review
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WB	World Bank
WPA	Wetland Protected Area

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Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project ~ Mid-Term Evaluation

1. Summary

1. The Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project (CIWP) is a 7-year project being implemented by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the support of the United Nations Development Program and the Global Environment Facility. In mid-2009, an independent Mid-Term Project Evaluation (MTE) was carried out, in accordance with UNDP and GEF requirements. This is the report of the MTE prepared following a two-week mission by the team of two consultants to the project offices and field sites in Iran. The report summarises the evaluators' findings and comments on each aspect of the CIW Project: concept and strategy; project design; arrangements for project supervision, management, financing, monitoring and evaluation; and implementation progress and achievements over the first 'half' of the project. For each section where relevant, recommendations are made for strengthening the second half and completing the project as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Summary Evaluation of the CIWP at the Mid-Term

RELEVANCE	The CIWP is of continued high relevance to Iran and to achievement of regional and global environmental benefits.
EFFICIENCY	CIWP implementation has been only moderately efficient to date, hindered by imprecise planning and design, slow start and implementation, and inattention to strategic management and budgeting.
EFFICACY	The CIWP has been moderately effective to date, but needs to clarify its objectives and focus on strategy and results rather than activities; the long-term institutional arrangements for wetlands & basin governance plus the project's role in facilitating systemic capacity development need to be confirmed.
SUSTAINABILITY	With increased efficiency, an extension in time and a clearer focus on the key planned results, the CIWP is likely to achieve its purpose of piloting and introducing an improved Iranian system for wetland & basin conservation that will be sustainable beyond the project – financially, socio-politically, institutionally and environmentally.

Project Concept, Strategy and Design

2. The CIW project was designed by consultants working with government and UNDP-GEF in the period 1998 to 2004. A substantial Project Brief and Project Document were prepared and approved with a planned budget of around \$12 million. Iran's Department of Environment (DoE) was designated Executing Agency, and project inception started in 2005, with establishment of a National Project Manager and staff, and office facilities at DoE headquarters in Tehran.
3. The CIWP is based on a number of important concepts: wetlands form one of the most significant portions of Iran's biodiversity and natural landscape, and are of high global and regional significance; they are valued highly and efforts to protect and conserve them have a long history in the country. While wetlands are well represented in Iran's protected areas system, they are also vulnerable to a range of increasing anthropogenic threats, which operate both at the local wetland site and across the surrounding upstream catchment.
4. The project is centred on finding effective ways to address the major threats. This requires engagement of the various sectors of natural resource users and managers, notably in water and energy; agriculture, grazing, fishing and hunting; urban and infrastructure

development. The purpose of the project is to devise, test and demonstrate an integrated resource management system for wetland conservation that is appropriate and sustainable. Pilot work is to be done in two wetland areas, Lake Uromiyeh and Lake Parishan, which will become demonstration models for an improved national system. CIWP's primary strategy is to facilitate the changes in capacity that are required in the institutions and individuals who form the system – government organizations, their planning, policy, legislation and information management capacities, and the participation of local resource users. The MTE finds each of these concepts underlying the CIWP to be highly relevant to the government institutions and people of Iran and to the project's principal support agencies, UNDP and the GEF.

5. The project design is summarized in the logical framework (LF), which should serve as the main tool for implementation planning, monitoring and evaluation. The CIWP LF was approved in 2005 with some minor changes during inception (2006), and revised more substantially at the end of 2008. The MTE considers the original (2006) LF to be poorly developed and worded, with basic problems of ambiguously-worded objectives and poorly-developed Indicators and Targets. The project is divided into 3 components – Outcome 1. at local wetland sites; Outcome 2. at basin and Provincial level; and Outcome 3. at national level – but it would have been more useful to have kept together the “local site” and “basin/ Province” actions, and to have focused on the primary objective of addressing the range of threats to wetlands and their basins rather than treating capacity building as the main objective for each component. While the revisions made to the LF and budget at the end of 2008 are good examples of adaptive management practice, they should have been made much earlier and at regular intervals. In addition, the 2008 version lost too much detail and did not include any National inputs: the MTE recommends further strengthening of both the logical framework and the budget process as ways of improving the strategic management of the project.
6. A basic concern with the CIWP design is the emphasis on strengthening Wetland Protected Areas (WPA), which is a divergence from the strategy of addressing threats to wetland biodiversity. Conventional PA thinking affected also the selection of the two pilot areas, LU and LP, which was made on the basis of species diversity in WPAs, rather than the potential for a wetland and basin to demonstrate effective strategies for addressing a range of threats. During implementation, the project has continued to vacillate between a conventionally narrow protected area approach, and a fully integrated natural resource management system. Although more challenging, the MTE considers the latter to be more relevant, appropriate and likely to achieve successful wetlands conservation in Iran. The root of the problem for CIWP's managers is that the project plan and logical framework do not make clear the key planned results or outputs nor the strategies for achieving them. The MTE recommends revising the LF Outputs to reconfirm the set of strategic results that are to be achieved by the CIWP over the remaining few years – by means of fully integrated NRM, conservation and tackling priority threats.

Project Management Arrangements

7. Arrangements for CIW **project supervision and management** include the Tri-Partite Review between the government and UNDP; a Project Steering Committee comprising representatives of national government organizations and the Provincial Governors' offices involved through the project's two pilot areas; a Project Technical Committee; and a Project Central Office. For each of the two pilot areas, a Provincial Coordinating Committee and a Provincial Technical Committee were also planned and formed, and the project established Field Offices. The TPR has met annually and the PSC has met more frequently; both appear to be functioning satisfactorily although with some duplication. The CIWP's Provincial Coordination and Technical Committees have not been formally active and do not seem to be necessary or useful for project supervision purposes.
8. The MTE considers there is a set of issues, concerning project supervision versus wetland &

basin governance, that have reduced the efficiency of CIWP and should be resolved for the next phase of the project. There should be a clear distinction made between supervision of the CIWP Project and governance of integrated management of wetland & basin resources in Iran. The thinking seems to be that the PSC is somehow responsible for both functions, which is not likely to be efficient or effective for either; the MTE considers that the PSC should be confirmed, streamlined and strengthened as the *ad hoc* body responsible only for supervising coordinated implementation of the CIWP, and that, separately from the PSC, there is an outstanding need to confirm and develop as required the long-term institutional arrangements for governing the use and conservation of wetlands and their basins.

9. **CIWP implementation** is led by a National Project Director who is Deputy Head of DoE, and full-time, project contract staff – National Project Manager, Deputy Manager and technical and administrative support. The project's main technical expertise is provided by part-time consultants recruited nationally and internationally. Recruitment and retention of senior staff was a problem in the first two years of the project and contributed to little progress being made with implementation. Since 2007, the project management and staff have been stable and have grown into a dedicated and competent team. The project has set up offices at DoE HQ in Tehran and at Provincial and District Governors' offices for the two pilot areas. The MTE makes a number of recommendations for strengthening the implementation team for the second half of the project, with particular regard to the use of consultants, and to the capacities of the two pilot area sub-teams.
10. The CIWP was planned with a total **budget** of nearly \$12 million, from the national government (around \$9 m) and the Global Environment Facility (around \$3 m). Three-quarters of the total project budget, including 83% of the National funds, were allocated to just 4 of the 15 planned Outputs. The rationale behind allocation of funds to specific objectives and targets is not clear, and the MTE considers that inadequate attention has been given during implementation to the strategic management of the budget and tracking of expenditure on outputs. One concern is that the budget was set unreasonably high, presumably because the atypical LU was included as a pilot area; there is a danger that this has set an unrealistic precedence for the long-term costs of the new management model for wetland conservation being promoted by the CIWP.
11. By the time of the MTE, end of Q1.2009, total **expenditure** had reached \$2.598 m (22% of the budget), comprising \$1.341m (46%) of GEF funds and \$1.257m (just 14%) of National funds. There were significant delays in expenditure in the first 3 years, while in the last full year of accounting, 2008, combined expenditure had risen to \$1.09m, but this was still only 51% of the planned budget for that year. Expenditure has been highest on Outcome 1 (64% of the planned GEF funds and 29% of National budget spent); and Outcome 3 (73% of GEF funds and 14% of National funds). Expenditure on Outcome 2 is seriously off-target, with only 8% of the planned GEF and 5% of the National funds for this Outcome having been spent to date.
12. The MTE notes the difficulty it had in compiling these figures, as the system for monitoring expenditure is inadequate and does not track each Output's costs or enable annual adjustments to Output allocations. The project has not been able to make adequate use of the project plan and LF to drive its strategic results (Outputs) or financial inputs; this lack of strategic management of project and budget has contributed to the slow expenditure. There are particular problems with the lack of a clear plan for the National budget and the lack of straightforward mechanisms for the PCO, DoE and other government agencies to requisition funds against this plan and implement actions.
13. The Project Document and Brief outline the plan for **monitoring, reporting and evaluation** of project progress and impacts, comprising quarterly and annual reports and reviews, independent mid-term and final evaluations, and ad hoc technical reviews. The MTE notes that the majority of the plan has been followed diligently since 2006-2007, with reports on administrative, financial and technical matters prepared routinely by the NPM and PCO for

the NPD, PSC, UNDP and the TPR.

14. The project's M&E suffer from the lack of clear substantive objectives in the project's logical framework, annual work plans, and individual activity plans. Without clear objectives and indicators, it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of actions. Monitoring reports account for activities carried out over the reporting period, but not whether they were successful or achieved the desired impact because the measures of success or impact are unclear. The MTE recommends strengthening M&E by confirming the strategic results (Outputs) that are planned and by defining a clear objective, target(s), milestones and indicators for each one. This will help to strengthen basic project monitoring, information management and reporting procedures, and also to measure impacts. It will also enable "adaptive management", by providing managers with feedback on whether an action was relevant and worked efficiently and effectively, or whether adjustments need to be made so that it performs better next time. The MTE suggests that a more systematic approach to adaptive management should be adopted as a matter of routine by the PCO, NPD, DoE and PSC, in order to make the most of the CIWP as a pilot, demonstration and learning initiative.

Project Progress and Achievements

15. The MTE reviewed the project's progress and results that have been achieved to date, mainly with reference to the project plan that was in operation until the end of 2008, of 3 Outcomes and 15 Outputs serving a single overall Project Objective. The first two components of the project are aimed at strengthening the management of the two pilot wetland sites. The third Outcome is aimed at establishing stronger national mechanisms and systems for supporting the two pilot areas and, subsequently, other wetland conservation areas across the country.
16. *Pilot area programs:* For each pilot area, the project has organised a program of actions towards planning management of the area's resources. The approach has been to engage the various groups of stakeholders and provide them with a forum for conferring and collaborating with one another. Several Working Groups were convened and brought together officials from the government agencies and some NGOs active in the two areas. A series of studies have generated situation reports, baseline data and maps on the biodiversity, water resources and socio-economic status of the two areas. A large number of training workshops have been used to introduce participants (from government, NGOs and local user groups) to ecosystem management, mapping, planning and monitoring techniques, and to prepare draft Management Plans for the LU and LP pilot areas. Underlying these activities, the CIWP has organised a useful "awareness-raising" program, to promote, inform and educate the range of stakeholders about the values of wetlands, the issues they are facing and the need for conservation.
17. The MTE concludes that one of the CIWP's most important impacts so far has been to influence the attitudes of Iranian government officials towards wetlands, ecosystem-based management and sectoral integration; there appears to be widespread understanding about the threats to wetlands and the need to change management practices and patterns of resource use. While the project has directed most of its attention to the two pilot areas, some studies and awareness-raising activities were focused on national issues, national stakeholders and general system guidelines rather than being pilot site-specific, and a number of the training workshops also were organised for national government officials.
18. *Management Plans:* The LU and LP Management Plans drafted in 2008 are the product of these changes in attitude and understanding. Officials and experts from the key government offices in each Province and nationally have come together with local community representatives and NGOs to produce the integrated plans. Ratification of the two Management Plans by National Cabinet and, in the preface to the LU Management Plan, the inter-governmental agreement to a vision, goal and integrated management of the wetland and basin, are CIWP's most significant achievements to date. By the time of the

MTE, the project was starting to move on to the next phase of facilitating the development and implementation of the two Management Plans. The intention is to attach series of detailed action plans and additional protocols, for example for monitoring implementation of the Plan, to the main document. Some physical site works had also been started, including PA boundary markers and sign boards.

19. The MTE raises concerns about the project relying heavily on the management plans as the main mechanism for framing wetland and basin policy and operational management decisions. The lengthy and complex process of integrating sectoral agencies' policies and practices has not yet resulted in any firm decisions, let alone management actions, to address issues in the two pilot areas. CIWP will need to demonstrate the effectiveness of its management plans in managing critical threats and conserving biodiversity.
20. *Lack of institutional development:* The MTE considers that a key factor affecting CIWP's efficiency and effectiveness is the lack of action to define and develop the institutions that are to be responsible for governing and managing the new style of wetland conservation and basin management in Iran. The Project Brief talks about "enhanced coordination at all levels"; the PSC promotes relatively simple ideas about inter-agency committees and "coordination"; and the project focuses on capacity-building of individuals in existing structures. However, there has not been adequate analysis or discussion about institutional and regulatory options available for more integrated forms of natural resources management in Iran. One consequence is the weak 'ownership' of the management plans by the permanent organizations responsible for managing wetlands and basin conservation beyond the project. The MTE makes a strong recommendation to define and establish the agency(ies) that will set policy, integrate functions, resolve disputes, and lead joint actions in managing wetlands in the long term.
21. *Capacity development:* CIWP's principal delivery strategy has been to build the capacity of relevant stakeholders to work more effectively towards the conservation of wetlands. Given this major focus, it is especially important to ensure that each capacity development activity is effective in achieving the planned results, and the MTE recommends that the PCO and PSC should invest in more critical evaluation of all capacity-building activities. The majority of project activities have targeted and benefited individuals, and clearly there has been a considerable amount of knowledge transfer to many officials in DoE and other agencies, and to a lesser extent, to members of NGOs and local community organizations. There has been relatively little action aimed at developing the functional capacities of organizational units, and even less addressing the capacity of the overall system, which as noted above has not yet been defined. The MTE recommends that this focus should shift markedly in the second half of the project, to use capacity development to reform the ways in which organizations work, both internally and with other organizations, and to create a more effective system for governing and managing wetland ecosystems.
22. *Policy development:* It is apparent that to date, the CIWP has had little influence on public policy, although planned Outcome 3 is potentially about policy reforms with respect to wetlands, biodiversity conservation, protected areas, management of natural resources and environmental issues, multi-sectoral integration and public participation in conservation planning and management. The PCO and PSC should plan a strategy for the project to facilitate strengthening the government's policy framework with respect to wetlands conservation and governing a national system, and should implement the strategy over the remaining 3-4 years of the project. The 5-Year National Development Plans are important vehicles for the development and implementation of public policy in Iran, across all sectors. At the time of the MTE, the 5th NDP was being compiled as an outline of the government's agenda for 2010 to 2014, during which period the CIWP will reach completion. It is thus a critical and timely opportunity for the project to introduce its policy objectives into the government's main strategic planning document; the 5th NDP should include an explicit reference to the CIWP strategy for rolling out nationally the improved system for governing and managing wetland ecosystems and their conservation.

23. *Replication strategy*: The final phase of the CIWP is to use the lessons drawn from the pilot areas to facilitate development of a strengthened national system of wetland conservation. The original plan was to develop “5-10 in-depth replication sites” from the other 34 WPA that were listed. In 2008, the project started work on one major replication site, the Shadegan marshes in Khuzestan Province, assisting local authorities to form working groups and proceed rapidly through a participatory management planning process.
24. The MTE raises the concern that the specifications for the new style of wetland conservation and water basin management are not yet clear, and that before any replication work is started, there is a need to consolidate what has been learned so far from the project’s pilot areas. The MTE recommends that Shadegan should be managed properly as a third CIWP pilot area, and the 3 pilot areas should be completed to the point where all operations are being managed by the permanent institutions. The CIWP should adopt a more systematic and rigorous approach to evaluation: every aspect of the pilot programs should be tested, evaluated against other options, and documented – institutional arrangements; policy, planning, participation and integration mechanisms; resource use practices (water, land, biodiversity); threat management strategies; information and monitoring procedures. Drawing lessons from the 3 pilot areas will enable the characteristics of the new Iranian model for wetlands conservation to be confirmed.
25. The MTE recommends a modified strategy for developing the strengthened national system of wetland conservation, rather than CIWP taking responsibility for developing a further set of “in-depth replication sites”. Instead, the CIWP should give strong support to the country-wide roll-out of the new model by facilitating development of the permanent organizations that will form the new system, and enabling them to take responsibility for developing replication wetland conservation areas. This phase should start immediately after the MTE, in parallel with consolidation of the pilot and demonstration areas.
26. The important lesson is that the overall program of work to strengthen wetlands conservation in Iran, which has been initiated, facilitated and supported by the CIW project, continues beyond the project – both in time, with further capacity development of the new, permanent organizations; and geographically, with the continued extension of the new model to additional Provinces, basins and wetland areas. Thus, the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands initiative will be sustained after the end of the CIW Project itself.

Project duration and extension

27. The CIW Project got off to a slow start, with little achieved in 2005 and 2006. A much more active program has been implemented in 2007, 2008 and the first part of 2009, but the MTE notes that progress each year has been slower than planned, and the project has not yet completed half of its work program, particularly with regard to Outcomes 2 and 3. Expenditure has been correspondingly slow, with only 22% of the budget spent by the end of Q1.2009.
28. The MTE recommends re-planning the second half of the project, to confirm the substantive results and targets that are planned for strengthening conservation of the pilot areas (3, including Shadegan), and extending the lessons through a replication strategy to a national system. Particular attention is needed to determine the time, budget and project human resources that will be required to achieve the planned results. The point at which the CIW project will end must also be confirmed, with reference to the end-of-project situation that should be reached. The slow start and progress provide reasonable justification for an extension of the project by one or two years. An extension should be planned by project management and the PSC, and approved by the TPR, in time to inform the annual planning and budgeting process for 2010 and subsequent years.

CONSERVATION OF IRANIAN WETLANDS PROJECT

Summary of MTE Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Project plan, logical framework, M&E

The CIWP logical framework should be revised further so that it may be used as a more rigorous guide and tool for strategic management, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project. Specific changes are suggested to the key planned Outputs. The project managers should use the guidance from the LF objectives, targets and indicators to plan a clear strategy for achieving each Output.

Recommendation 2. Project supervision and Wetlands governance

Two distinct bodies should be confirmed – (1) the temporary Project Steering Committee, responsible for supervising project implementation, nationally and at the pilot sites; and (2) a National Wetlands Conservation Working Group, responsible for governing wetlands conservation in the long term. The NWC Working Group could be part of or work under the auspices of an existing relevant high-level government committee, commission or council. The CIW Project should work in an off-line capacity, facilitating the pilot area programs and establishment of a national wetlands conservation program under the national governing body.

Recommendation 3. CIWP management – Human resources

3.1: Following the MTE, project staff salaries and benefits should be reviewed and brought into line as far as possible with those in equivalent positions on other projects and programs.

As importantly, the CIWP should invest in preparing an adequate professional development plan for its staff members, which should anticipate the finite term of the project and consider options that may be available for each individual and for the team as a whole to continue their work in a related capacity.

3.2: As part of re-confirming the Outputs to be achieved over the second half of the project, there should be a reassessment of the requirements for full-time technical staff, and steps taken to increase the number and capacities of the core staff and reduce the number of part-time, off-line consultants.

3.3: The capacities of the project offices for the three pilot areas (Uromiyeh, Parishan and Shadegan) should be strengthened, recognizing their prime function of facilitating development of the long-term institution(s) that will govern and manage integrated wetland ecosystem conservation in the pilot areas.

Recommendation 4. CIWP Financial management

4.1: In conjunction with UNDP and PSC members, the DoE and PCO should overhaul the system for CIWP budget planning and expenditure monitoring, in line with the following specific suggestions:

- The PCO should set up its own simple spreadsheet-based system to plan the allocation of funds and to monitor expenditure, from each source to each (re-confirmed) Output, for each quarter and 6-month period.
- Working on a rolling 6-month cycle should enable the project to cope with the two off-set annual cycles of the two sources of funds, UNDP-GEF and National.
- Funds requested and received at the PCO from each source must be transformed each way from and into the project's Outputs-based budget, rather than trying to make do with UNDP's ATLAS chart of accounts.
- Further revisions should be made to the Outputs, work plans and budget requirements (from both sources) for the remainder of the project, in order to

confirm a realistic schedule and rate of disbursement for the project to reach satisfactory completion; it is now too late in the project to try to rectify the slow expenditure of the National funds.

- There are sufficient remaining GEF and National funds, and sufficient work to be done, to extend the CIWP budget by at least one full year, to the end of 2012.

4.2: The National budget plan for the remaining 3 or so years of the CIWP should be reviewed and revised thoroughly by the PCO and PSC, and then re-confirmed by the government. This should be done following confirmation of the new institutional and long-term funding arrangements for the new model of wetland conservation and basin management being piloted by the project.

Recommendation 5. Long-term institutional arrangements for wetlands conservation

A careful analysis of the institutional issues and options for the new Iranian wetlands conservation system should be prepared and discussed, and the project's strategy for institutional reform and development agreed. The new institutional arrangements must be specified for governance, management and participation at local, basin/ Province and national levels. The ways in which the DoE and key sectoral Ministries – Agricultural Jihad, Energy & WRM, Roads & Transportation – will collaborate and integrate their wetlands-related policies and programs need to be formally agreed. Working relationships should be confirmed between wetlands conservation agencies and existing high-level coordination mechanisms.

Recommendation 6. Management Plans for wetland sites and basins

The management planning mechanism being introduced by CIWP should be strengthened; for each pilot area, a more robust governance framework (local, Provincial and national) is needed for integrated management of the whole catchment, within which a series of more conventional Management Plans may be applied (to specific sites, sectors, species and/or issues). Management planning should be a clearly staged process, progressively developing a strategic policy framework and action program. The management plan should be signed/ approved in stages, not as a "finished document"; it should include clear precise policies and rigorous targets and indicators; and it should be owned by the permanent institutions responsible for implementing the plan.

Recommendation 7. Capacity development under the CIWP

7.1: The CIWP should take a more critical look at the effectiveness of all of its capacity development activities. It is important to ensure that each activity is effective in achieving the planned results, which are to do with changed behaviours; revised policies; improved practices, etc. that in turn are needed to address each of the substantive threats that are degrading Iran's wetlands. The logical framework's Output objectives and Indicators need further development – see Recommendation 1 – so that they can be used as tools for monitoring and evaluating progress towards these fundamental objectives, rather than merely recording the range of activities.

7.2: The majority of the project's activities have targeted and benefited individuals involved in the 2 pilot area programs; there has been relatively little action aimed at developing the functional capacities of organizational units, and even less addressing the capacity of the overall system. This focus should shift markedly in the second half of the project, given the need to re-form the ways in which organizations work, both internally and with other organizations, in order to create a more effective system for governing and managing wetland ecosystems.

Recommendation 8 Influencing Government Policy

The PCO and PSC should plan a clear strategy for strengthening the government's policy framework with respect to wetlands conservation and governance, and implement this plan over the remaining 3-4 years of the project. In particular, the 5th National Development Plan is a critical and timely opportunity for the project to introduce its policy objectives into the government's main strategic planning document; the 5th NDP should refer explicitly to the CIWP strategy (not yet defined) for rolling out nationally the improved system for governing and managing wetland ecosystems and their conservation.

Recommendation 9. Pilot evaluation and confirmation of the new style of wetland conservation and water basin management

A more rigorous approach is required to the evaluation of the project's experimental/pilot work: every aspect of the pilot programs should be tested systematically, evaluated against other options, and documented. Using this approach, the CIWP pilot area actions should be completed and evaluated, and the new model system for wetland conservation should be documented and confirmed, before starting any replication sites or extending into a national system. Shadegan should be developed as a third CIWP pilot area, and the 3 pilot areas should be completed to the point where all operations are being handled by the permanent institutions.

Recommendation 10. Replication strategy

The project should modify its strategy for developing the strengthened national system of wetland conservation: rather than CIWP taking responsibility for developing a further set of "in-depth replication sites", the recommended strategy is to facilitate development of the permanent organizations that will form the new system, and enable them to take responsibility for developing the replication sites. In the remaining few years of the CIWP, it is essential to consolidate the results of the first phase and demonstrate the effectiveness of the new model, 3-level system of wetlands conservation at the 3 pilot areas. CIWP second phase should start immediately after the MTE, in parallel with the demonstrations being developed, and give strong support to the country-wide roll-out of the new model.

Recommendation 11. Project duration, extension and completion

Recognizing that CIWP progress each year has been slower than planned, with less than half the work program completed, and only 22% of the planned budget mobilized, the second half of the project should be re-planned, with particular attention to the time, budget and PCO human resources that will be required to achieve the substantive results of strengthened conservation of the pilot areas (3, including Shadegan) and extend the lessons to a national system and replication strategy.

The end-point for the CIWP should be confirmed as the point when each of the components of the new Iranian system for wetlands conservation is up and running. The slow start and lack of real progress in 2005 and 2006 provide reasonable justification for an extension of the project by one or two years. Any extension should be planned by project management and the PSC, and approved by the TPR, in time to inform the annual planning and budgeting process for 2010 and beyond.

2. Introduction

The Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project

1. Iran is an extraordinarily rich country in terms of ecology and biodiversity, on account of its geography, size and location, at the intersection of four major bio-geographic realms. The country has a total land area of 1.648 million km² and borders on the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean in the west and south, the Caspian Sea in the north, Iraq and Azerbaijan in the north and west, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan in the east and south. Its wetland ecosystems in particular exemplify Iran's rich biodiversity, ranging from coastal lagoons, reefs and mangrove forest to extensive inland watercourses, marshlands and lake systems, both freshwater and hyper-saline.
2. Over 150 Iranian wetland sites are considered to be of international significance for conservation on the basis of the quality of the globally and regionally important biodiversity they support. The significance of wetlands to Iran is heightened by the arid conditions that prevail in much of the country; wetland lakes, marshes and surface waterways form oases across this landscape, fed by rain and snow that fall on several extensive mountain ranges. Besides forming rich pools of life, wetlands add considerable beauty to many valleys and low lying land, and have delighted the senses of Iranians for centuries.
3. The project titled "Conservation of Iranian Wetlands" (CIWP) is an initiative of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to strengthen protection of the country's important wetland sites, principally by introducing improved systems for governing and managing the many human activities that use and threaten wetland resources, water catchments and associated biodiversity.
4. The project was designed using the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Project Development Facility (PDF) between 1998 and 2004. The CIWP was approved in 2005, with UNDP as GEF Implementing Agency and the Iranian Department of Environment designated as Executing Agency. A 7-year project was planned with a budget of \$12.7 millions, the bulk of which (\$9.1 m, 72%) is provided by the national Government, augmented by a GEF Full-Sized Project grant of \$3.29 m, provided under the GEF-III tranche Biodiversity portfolio.
5. The project's objectives are to strengthen management capacities and address prevailing threats at two pilot wetland sites of national and global significance, and then to demonstrate the lessons learned at these sites to reform and strengthen the national system for governing and conserving wetlands across the country.

Mid-Term Project Evaluation

6. The Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project (CIWP) was started in January 2005 and is intended to run until December 2011. The project's plan for performance monitoring and evaluation includes annual reviews and comprehensive independent evaluations at the mid-term and end of the project, in accordance with UNDP and GEF requirements.
7. The Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE) of the CIWP was undertaken in May-June 2009, 4.5 years after the project's formal start date, by a team of two independent consultants, one international and one national. The aim was to conduct a participatory evaluation that would lead to good understanding and concurrence with the evaluation's findings and recommendations, and would contribute to local capacity development. To this end, in addition to reviewing and analysing all technical and financial documentation made available, the MTE process included systematic consultations with the project staff, the Implementing Agency and Executing Agency, and the full range of stakeholders involved in

governing, managing and using wetlands and associated resources at the two pilot sites and nationally.

8. The MTE was carried out in accordance with terms of reference provided by the project's Implementing Agency, UNDP Iran. Refer to **ANNEX I** of this report. The itinerary achieved by the MTE consultants is summarised in **ANNEX II.1**. Respondents who met with the MTE consultants and the documents reviewed by the MTE are listed in **ANNEX II.2** and **II.3** respectively.
9. The main body of this report reviews each aspect of the CIWP – Project design; supervision, management and administrative arrangements; project implementation progress and achievements; project monitoring and evaluation – and in each section presents the findings and recommendations of the Mid-Term Evaluation. The MTE recommendations for strengthening CIWP delivery and impact are collated in the Evaluation Summary.

3. Project Concept and Design

The CIW Project Concept

10. The thinking that led to the development of the CIW Project is summarised in the Project Brief and in the later Project Inception Report. Both talk about the need for “new approaches” to wetlands conservation in Iran, based on the assessment that the conventional tool of Wetland Protected Areas, under various designations established by the Department of the Environment (DoE), has not proved effective. A national overview of Iran's wetlands had been compiled in 1995 as part of a regional assessment, A Directory of Wetlands of the Middle East¹. The review discussed the high levels of wetland exploitation across the country – for agriculture, grazing, fisheries, water reservoirs, hydro-electricity generation, salt mining, harvesting of reeds and aquatic plants, waterbird hunting and trapping for sport, food and income – and the severe and increasing pressures caused by diverse human activities on broader wetlands ecosystems, from drainage, dams, diversions, pollution, loss of natural vegetation, soil erosion, siltation, eutrophication and introduction of exotic species.
11. The new approaches that are to be tested and demonstrated through the CIWP include the following:
 - Focus on wetlands habitat protection and the whole ecosystem, rather than species and control of hunting.
 - Base wetlands management on better understanding of their ecological requirements.
 - Address threats from outside the protected area boundaries.
 - Engage other key stakeholders (Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Jihad Agriculture) in the management system.
 - Engage local people in the wetlands conservation system.
 - Develop an effective management plan for each wetland conservation area.
 - Develop and enforce adequate wetlands legislation.

Source: Project Document 2004

12. These ideas translate into introducing a system of integrated management for wetlands and their associated catchments that is appropriate, effective and sustainable. In summary, the concept behind the CIWP is to introduce a conservation system in Iran in which local communities and other users of wetland ecosystems participate in decision-making

¹ 1995. A Directory of Wetlands in the Middle East, D.A. Scott (compiler). World Conservation Union.

(planning) and management to ensure that human activities affecting wetlands are controlled within reasonable limits so that the wetland remains in a healthy ecological condition. Two central ideas that characterize the CIWP are **participation** – for the range of relevant stakeholders to be appropriately, actively engaged in the conservation effort – and **integration** – to ensure that decisions about land, water and biodiversity use that affect wetlands take into account the diverse influences upon wetlands by all sectors of human economic development and livelihood activities.

13. The concept of multiple use wetland conservation areas in which stakeholders are actively participating is highly relevant to Iran. Iran has a large number of wetlands of high ecological and economic significance and has a long history of operating a protected areas system across the country. Nevertheless, its protected areas system has not been effective in addressing the threats to biodiversity and ecosystem functioning, the majority of which have increased significantly over recent years. As a consequence, large numbers of Iran's wetlands are becoming seriously degraded, to the point where both the biodiversity and the human activities reliant on wetlands are dying out.
14. An important aspect of the CIWP is that the condition of wetlands across Iran is indicative of the general ecological state of the country. Iran is a large country rich in natural resources with diverse ecosystems and associated flora and fauna. However, it is also a highly arid country in which wetlands, watercourses and groundwater are of considerable significance in governing the health and productivity of these ecosystems and biological communities.
15. The other main concept behind the design and strategy of the CIWP is that of addressing threats. In the Project documentation, useful summaries are provided of the diverse, prevailing threats to Iran's wetlands, and each of the main project outputs is phrased in terms of addressing these threats. Several major categories of threats are described:
 - Changes to the water regime (dams, diversions, irrigation, wastage)
 - Aquatic and noise pollution (from agriculture, industry, domestic, boats and aircraft)
 - Unsustainable exploitation of wetland resources (over-fishing, -grazing, -hunting)
 - Conversion of wetland habitats (agriculture and urban developments)
 - Land degradation in watersheds (deforestation, over-grazing, agriculture)
 - Transport infrastructure
 - Species introductions, invasive species (accidental and deliberate).

Source: Project Brief 2003; Project Inception Report 2006

Project Strategy

16. The underlying strategy of the CIWP is as a pilot and demonstration project. The primary focus of the project is on strengthening the management of two wetland sites and their catchments, which were selected during project formulation: Lake Uromiyeh (LU) basin lies in West & East Azerbaijan and Kurdistan Provinces in the north-west of Iran; and Lake Parishan (LP) and its much smaller catchment lie in the Kazerun District of Fars Province in the region of the southern Zagros mountains. LU and LP are the locations where the project aims to introduce, pilot and demonstrate efficient, effective and appropriate ways of achieving long term conservation, including sustainable utilisation, of the wetland ecosystems and their biodiversity. The project is then intended to use the lessons emerging from the two pilot areas to facilitate development of a strengthened national system of wetland conservation, with the goal of replicating the improved model in a systematic way across the country.
17. The Project Brief provided an overview of Iranian wetlands and their significance in the country's protected areas network and overall biodiversity conservation strategy. The MTE prepared **table 1** as a summary schedule of wetland sites in Iran and the range of their legal

status and recognition. The two Wetland Protected Areas (WPA) that were selected as CIWP pilot areas are included in the table.

Table 1: Iranian Wetlands and their Status

Schedule of Iranian Wetland Sites	No. of sites	Areas (ha)
Wetland sites in Iran	1000+	
Wetland sites in DoE database	152	
Wetland sites considered of international significance (WIS)	76	
• WIS sites not Ramsar listed nor nationally protected	40	
• WPAs – Ramsar listed only ²	10	
• WPAs – some national legal protection	26	
- National Park ²	2	619,500
- Wildlife Refuge	6	660,000
- Protected Area ³	13	407,000
- No Hunting Area	4	21,000
- Limited Hunting Area	2	3,000

Source: CIWP Project Brief, 2003

18. The Project Brief and logical framework (and the Inception Report) are not consistently clear about the scope of the CIWP, including whether it is committed to strengthening basin catchment management or only local “wetland sites”; and what exactly the selected “pilot sites” comprise: the first pilot may be Lake Uromiyeh Basin or LU “Ecological Zone” or Lake Uromiyeh itself (a WPA and an NP), plus some or all of the WPAs within the LUB or LUEZ, plus some other non-WPA “LU satellite wetlands”. The second pilot may be Lake Parishan itself, the whole LP Basin, and/ or the whole of the formally designated Arjan Protected Area. These distinctions should have been resolved and the implications made clear for all stakeholders during design or inception of the project.
19. Similarly, the strategy for replication is not expressed clearly in the Project Brief and, even at the time of the MTE, the project had not prepared or confirmed a clear plan. The Brief indicates that the lessons learned at the two pilot sites will be applied to a selection of “5-10” other WPAs as CIWP “in-depth replication sites”, and then somehow to all the remaining WPAs. These numbers are not straightforward however, and have contributed to confusion about the project’s objectives, including whether the CIWP is primarily a “protected areas” project or primarily an “integrated NRM” type of project.
20. The designation of a wetland as a “Wetland Protected Area” is an informal term used in Iran to signify that the site is either a legally protected area (of one category or another under national legislation) or has been recognized as a wetland of international significance under the Ramsar Convention, or both.
21. As listed in **table 1**, Iran’s DoE recognises 36 WPAs, plus a further 40 non-WPA wetland sites of international significance, plus a further 76 wetland sites not of international significance, plus a further 750 wetland sites that are presumably of only local importance. The project plan suggests that CIWP applies only to WPA sites, whereas the MTE suggests that the project is actually a pilot and learning exercise relevant to all wetlands, and should be implemented as such.

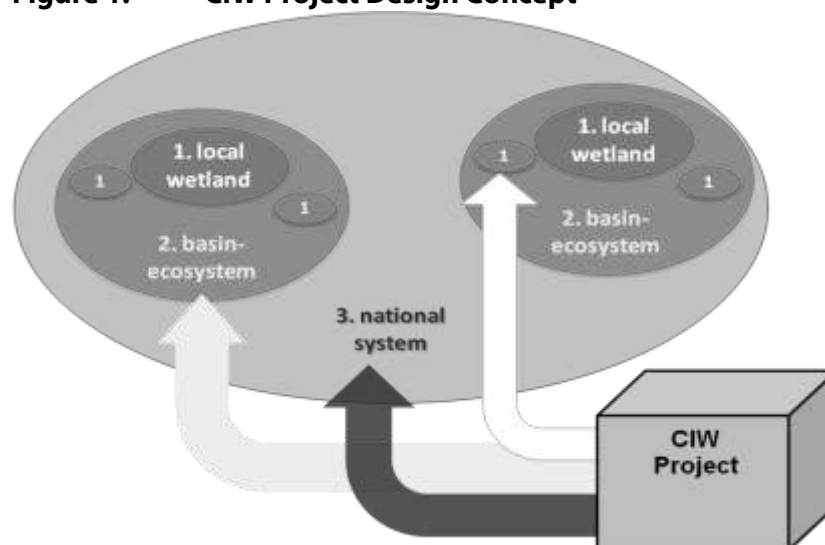
² One CIWP pilot area is Lake Uromiyeh basin, in which the lake itself is designated National Park, and several of its satellite wetlands are also designated separately as WPAs.

³ One CIWP pilot area is Lake Parishan and its basin, which lies partially within the Arjan Protected Area.

Project Design

22. The project design was developed through two phases using grants from the GEF Project Development Facility – a PDF'A' grant of \$25,000 in 1998-2000, and a PDF'B' grant of \$347,400 in 2001-02. The PDF phase generated a number of studies, which were used to prepare a detailed Project Description or Brief in 2003, and the formal Project Document which was duly signed in 2005 by the Government of Iran and the United Nations Development Programme in Iran, as the GEF Implementing Agency for the project.
23. At the same time as the PDF'B', the World Bank, FAO and European Commission were completing an Irrigation Improvement Project in Iran, which included a range of baseline assessments and water resource planning work in parts of the Lake Uromiyeh basin that was made available to the CIWP designers. In addition, a 2-year project was developed with funding from the Government of the Netherlands, and it was envisaged that the two projects would be implemented in a complementary manner to one another. Subsequently the Dutch project was implemented and completed prior to the start of the CIWP, but, the MTE was advised, did provide considerable baseline data and capacity building that were useful for the start-up of the CIWP.
24. The CIW Project Brief provides a good overview of the substantive background to the proposed project, including the extent and nature of wetlands in Iran, and their ecological, economic and social significance. The Brief presents the proposed design of the CIW Project as a 7-year initiative with the overall project objective of addressing the threats prevailing at two pilot wetland sites and demonstrating the lessons learned, towards the goal of strengthening the system for managing wetland protected areas throughout Iran.
25. To achieve this overall objective, the structure of the project consists of three main components termed Outcomes, each of which specifies a series of sub-outcomes comprising sets of activities. The whole of the CIWP and each of the 3 Outcomes are described in terms of strengthening the management of Iran's system of "Wetland Protected Areas" (WPA): Outcome 1 is focused on the local management of the individual pilot WPA; Outcome 2 on the management of WPA issues at the scale of the pilot basins; and Outcome 3 on the overall national system for effective WPA management and wetlands conservation in general. Refer to **figure 1**.

Figure 1: CIW Project Design Concept



The CIW Project has 3 planned Outcomes:

1. Conservation and sustainable use of 2 pilot sites, including satellite wetlands;
2. Integrated ecosystem management throughout the 2 pilot basins; and
3. Establishment of a national system for the conservation of wetlands.

Table 2: CIWP Hierarchy of Objectives

	Objectives
Goal	To catalyse the sustainability of Iran's system of wetland protected areas (WPAs), thereby enhancing its effectiveness as a tool for conserving globally significant biodiversity.
Project Objective	To systematically remove or substantially mitigate threats facing globally significant biodiversity and sustainability at two demonstration sites, while ensuring that the lessons learned through these demonstrations are absorbed within WPA management systems throughout Iran.
Outcome 1	Local WPA management structures (e.g., National Park offices, DoE Provincial offices) possess and use enhanced capacities to effectively manage WPA sites, including dealing with most 'internally arising' threats to globally significant biodiversity
Sub-outcome 1.1	DOE and other agency staff are well trained in ecosystem-based planning, management and monitoring.
Sub-outcome 1.2	Baseline environmental assessment and biodiversity monitoring programmes are implemented to identify and track the impacts of all anthropogenic threats
Sub-outcome 1.3	Public awareness of wetland values and threats is raised, and local communities participate in WPA management through cooperation with WPA managers
Sub-outcome 1.4	Issues and threats to biodiversity arising within WPAs are addressed through site conservation and enforcement of regulation according to agreed management plans.
Sub-outcome 1.5	Destruction of wetland habitats is halted and restoration measures implemented
Outcome 2	Inter-sectoral co-ordination structures, established at provincial and basin level, enhance the sustainability of the WPA system by, inter alia, helping to address threats arising at ecosystem level
Sub-outcome 2.1	Inter-sectoral decision-making facilitated, and wise use of land and water resources enhanced in favour of sustaining WPAs, through the establishment of appropriate coordination mechanisms.
Sub-outcome 2.2	Improved sustainability of WPAs through the application of principles of Integrated Water Resources Management (including baseline analyses, scenario development, water use efficiency measures, allocations for ecosystem requirements etc).
Sub-outcome 2.3	Integrated pollution control practices have been developed, demonstrated and implemented.
Sub-outcome 2.4	Enhanced measures for preventing land degradation have been introduced and are helping to reduce sedimentation and related negative impacts on downstream wetlands.
Sub-outcome 2.5	Best practices in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) demonstrated and being implemented.
Sub-outcome 2.6	Best practices concerning alien species introduction and control demonstrated and being implemented.
Outcome 3	National-level WPA management and inter-sectoral co-ordination structures possess and utilise enhanced capacities to strengthen WPA management, inter alia, by supporting the exchange of knowledge and lessons learned through Outcomes 1&2 above
Sub-outcome 3.1	Human capacities for WPA management are strengthened and essential national-level WPA management tasks are improved through rationalisation of relevant DoE headquarters structures, training and demonstration
Sub-outcome 3.2	Awareness and technical capacities are raised in key sectoral ministries while National co-ordination structures are strengthened
Sub-outcome 3.3	Public awareness of wetland values and threats to wetlands is raised across Iran
Sub-outcome 3.4	Lessons learned in Outcomes 1 and 2 are disseminated to managers of other key WPA sites, replication sites established, and project sustainability assured

Source: from CIWP Logical Framework revised 2006

26. The hierarchy of project objectives, from 15 sub-outcomes to 3 Outcomes and a single overall project objective and goal, is shown in **table 2** above. Under each Outcome, 4 to 6 sub-Outcomes are planned to address different aspects of the capacity development process – building awareness, participation, knowledge and the management system – at each level. In the original Project Document and Brief, there are detailed activity plans for each sub-Outcome, with a total of 128 Activities and sub-Activities described under 28 Activity Areas.

MTE Findings & Recommendations

27. The design process for the CIWP took many years, from the initial concept preparation starting in 1998, to the Inception Phase in 2005-06, more than 8 years later. The process occupied several groups of consultants and reviewers, and several iterations of the design. The MTE took place 10 years after the design process started, and over that time, many individual managers in each of the agencies involved have shared responsibility for maintaining records on the process and the rationale behind various design and management decisions; inevitably there has been loss of knowledge about the evolving design of the project.
28. The MTE finds that the basic design of the CIWP Project does provide a reasonable guide to the implementation process, but that the wording used in parts of the original logical framework (LF) was not clear, which led to some confusion and misinterpretation. The overall impression gained in 2009 is that the LF prepared through the design process has not been as useful a tool as it should have been, and that the design and LF have not been used sufficiently to guide strategic planning, implementation or monitoring over the past 4 or so years. The MTE concludes that this has reduced the efficiency and effectiveness of project implementation. A summary of MTE comments on the 2006 version LF is provided in **table 3**. The CIWP LF (2006 version) used from inception to the end of 2008 is included for information in **ANNEX III** to this report, with the other versions for comparison.
29. The MTE's general concern with the design, LF and work plans of the CIWP, is that there is insufficient focus on strategic planning and management aimed at achieving results. Plans at all levels are reduced to lengthy lists and sub-lists of activities, but the strategies to be followed and substantive objectives and impacts sought are not specified. This has limited the efficiency and effectiveness of project management (and has also made evaluation difficult).

Table 3: MTE Comments on CIWP Design and Logical Framework (v. 2006)

- a) Many of the objective statements (Goal, Objective, Outcome, sub-Outcome) are poorly worded; they are lengthy and poorly edited so that the meaning is not clear. Many of the statements contain several action verbs; for example, Outcome 1 states 3 objectives: "to develop capacities of local WPA management"; in order "to manage WPA sites"; in order "to address threats to biodiversity". In unravelling this statement, the project focused on capacity development rather than on the underlying objective of addressing threats.
- b) The three major planned Outcomes do not form a useful structure for the management of the CIWP: each reads as though it is merely a capacity development sub-project, at "local", Province-/ basin-wide, and national levels, which again removes attention from the objectives of carrying out practical management actions and of addressing specific threats. In addition, there is little practical value in trying to separate management of a "local site" from management of its "ecosystem or basin".
- c) The sub-Outcomes were not planned or specified with sufficient care or precision, and have not been used sufficiently as the key planned results to be achieved. For many of them, the focus is on activities and process, and the substantive objective or planned result is not made clear.
- d) The LF includes indicators and some targets for the sub-Outcomes, but these should have been developed further: there are few indicators of impact; too many of them are simple process indicators with no milestones or targets specified for evaluating progress; there are no explicit targets for the LP pilot. There are no Outcome indicators or targets.

30. At the end of 2008 the LF was revised for the first time since inception, in an attempt to address the sorts of design issues raised above (**table 3**), and to improve the utility of the LF. **Table 4** summarises the revised Outcome and Output objectives in the 2008 version LF. This revision was a worthwhile exercise and was partially successful. However, the MTE considers that further work is required to improve the LF: the 2008 version contains just 7 Outputs, reduced from 15, and too much detail has been lost; the 7 Outputs are simplified to capacity development objectives with no reference to specific threats; the number of Indicators for each Output is increased to provide more detail, but the MTE does not consider this good practice. The new LF still did not specify Indicators or Targets for each Outcome.

Table 4: CIWP Revised Outcome and Output Objectives, December 2008

Outcome 1	Model management system designed and being implemented by DOE and other local stakeholders at WPA demonstration sites to effectively address the most significant ‘internally arising’ threats to globally significant biodiversity
Output 1.1	Ecosystem-based management plans being implemented to address key internal threats by trained managers at Lake Uromiyeh and Lake Parishan
Output 1.2	Local communities aware of values and actively participating in management of Lake Parishan and Lake Uromiyeh
Outcome 2	Model inter-sectoral coordination demonstrated at provincial and basin level enhances the sustainability of the WPA system by, inter alia helping to address threats arising at ecosystem level.
Output 2.1	Inter-sectoral governance mechanisms established addressing basin-wide threats to sustainability of LU and LP
Output 2.2	Strategies being implemented to address main basin-level threats to LU and LP
Outcome 3	National level WPA management and inter-sectoral coordination structures possess and utilize enhanced capacities, and the model system developed through Outcomes 1&2 above is applied to WPAs throughout Iran through strategies, replications, tools and exchange of knowledge and lessons learned
Output 3.1	National DOE and inter-sectoral capacity to apply the ecosystem approach to WPAs raised and DOE has a strategy to roll out the project system for WPA management across Iran
Output 3.2	National system established to plan and roll-out demonstration model approach to WPAs throughout Iran
Output 3.3	Public awareness of wetland values is raised

Source: CIW Project Logical Framework revision, December 2008

31. Besides issues of poor LF wording and definition, the MTE has a concern with the substantive focus of the project design being on “strengthening the WPA system”. The MTE considers that it is essential to work more broadly on strengthening Iran’s wetlands conservation system, and for all stakeholders to acknowledge that this means moving beyond the WPA system and a conventional (and ineffective) protected areas approach. This broader purpose is recognised clearly in the CIWP preparatory documents, but is not captured in the detailed design or logical framework. If the project is executed well as a mechanism for bringing about these systemic changes, it will make a valuable contribution to the strengthening of biodiversity conservation practices throughout Iran, in wetlands and all ecosystems. However, this vision is not likely to be realised if project implementation is limited to strengthening “local WPA management” (Outcome 1), “the WPA system... at basin-level” (Outcome 2), and “National WPA management” (Outcome 3).
32. The **MTE recommends (Rec 1.)** that an early opportunity should be taken to revise further the CIWP logical framework so that it may be used as a more rigorous guide and tool for strengthening implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It would be useful to review and revise the project logical framework and the plan for monitoring, reporting & evaluation in Q3 2009, in time to provide the basis for detailed planning for the remainder of the project, from 2010 and including a possible extension of at least 1 year, to 2012 or 2013. A number of recommended changes to the project design logical framework are in **table 5.1**, and suggestions for more specific changes to the key Outputs are made in **table 5.2**.

33. The more general recommendation is to make full use of the re-developed logical framework as a strategic management tool and for strengthened M&E: in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their actions, the project managers should use the guidance from the LF objectives, targets and indicators to plan a clear strategy for achieving each Output.

Table 5.1: Summary of recommended changes to the logical framework

- (a) **Goal** – It is suggested that the Goal statement should not be changed at this stage. However, it should be noted that the Goal towards which the CIWP is working is *Protection of Iran’s biodiversity*.
Project purpose – While the Purpose statement should not be changed at this stage, stakeholders should note that the essential Purpose of the CIWP is *Development of an effective management system for conserving Iran’s wetland ecosystems*.
- (b) **Outcomes and Outputs** –
 It is recommended that a set of critical Outputs should be re-confirmed – drawn from the re-examination of the 7 new Outputs (Dec 2008 version) plus the 15 original sub-Outcomes (2006 version). The confirmed Outputs should be concerned with the substantive results flagged in the original sub-Outcomes – refer to **table 5.2** for suggestions for rationalisation. The confirmed Outputs should be used as the main framework for detailed work-planning, budget planning and expenditure management, operations management, monitoring, reporting and evaluation, for the remainder of the project.
 The two sets of Outputs under Outcomes 1 and 2 should be managed together rather than trying to maintain an artificial distinction between local site and ecosystem-wide work.
 It may be useful to introduce an additional Outcome 4, of effective and efficient Project Management, with a suitable set of 3-4 additional Outputs.
- (c) **Indicators, Targets, Milestones** –
 One or two Indicators are needed for each of the CIWP confirmed objectives – Purpose, Outcomes, Outputs. Each should be written as a single, integrating, higher-level ‘signal of success’, with a focus on impact rather than process.
 Targets and milestones should be used to specify explicitly the staged results that are sought.
- (d) **Baseline** –
 Just as the re-confirmed set of Outputs should specify the substantive results that are planned, there should be a statement of the baseline/ start-of-project condition for each.

Table 5.2: CIWP planned Outputs - underlying substantive objectives and links

Output 1.3	Public awareness and community participation	need to link 1.3 and 3.3
	3.3 Public awareness of wetlands raised across Iran	
Output 1.1	Integrated ecosystem-based management	need to link 1.1, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1 and 3.2
	2.1 Integrated land and water resources management	
	2.2 Integrated water resources management	
	3.1 National-level wetlands management system	
	3.2 Capacity development in key Ministries	
Output 1.2	Anthropogenic threats - assessment, monitoring	need to link 1.2, 1.4, 2.3 and 2.5
	1.4 Anthropogenic threats - removal and abatement	
	2.3 Integrated pollution controls	
	2.5 Environmental impact assessments (EIA)	
Output 1.5	Wetland habitat protection and restoration	need to link 1.5, 2.4 and 2.6
	2.4 Enhanced land conservation	
	2.6 Invasive alien species control	
Output 3.4	Country-wide replication of new wetland conservation system	

based on the 2006 LF Outputs

4. Project Management Arrangements

34. This section reviews and evaluates the arrangements made for all aspects of supervision, management, administration, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the CIWP.

Project Supervision Arrangements

35. The CIW Project is implemented under the UNDP National Execution (NEX) modality with the Government of Iran's Department of Environment (DoE) designated as National Executing Agency and the Deputy Head of DoE for Natural Environment and Biodiversity Affairs nominated as National Project Director (NPD). Under NEX rules, the Executing Agency has primary responsibility for successful project implementation. The formal governing body for the CIWP is the Tri-Partite Review (TPR), comprising UNDP, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and DoE. There is in addition a CIW Project Steering Committee (PSC), and a subsidiary Technical Committee. The memberships of these bodies at the time of the MTE are as listed in **table 6** below.

Table 6: Membership of CIWP Governing Bodies

Tri-Partite Review	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Chair) United Nations Development Programme Iran Department of Environment (DoE)
Project Steering Committee	Department of Environment, National (NPD ~ Chair) Department of Environment, Fars, E. & W. Azerbaijan Provinces Governors' offices, Fars Province, E. & W. Azerbaijan Provinces United Nations Development Programme Iran Ministry of Agricultural Jihad (MAJ) Ministry of Energy (MoE) Ministry of Industry & Mines
Project Technical Committee	Department of Environment Ministry of Agricultural Jihad Ministry of Energy Ministry of Industry & Mines Iranian Committee on Eco-Tourism

36. While the TPR has apparently met annually since 2005⁴, the PSC has been regarded as the main decision-making body for the CIWP. The PSC has also met once or twice a year since project inception⁵, and meetings are well attended, largely by expert staff from the various agencies rather than senior managers. The NPD is the Chair of the PSC, and is responsible for carrying out its directives. The PSC receives progress reports, including an Annual Progress Report from the National Project Manager (NPM) and Project Central Office (PCO), and reviews and endorses the project's Annual Budget & Work Plan. The Technical Committee has come to involve many of the same individuals as the PSC, and has apparently not met separately on a regular basis.

37. The Project Document (2004) proposed also a Project Coordination Committee plus a Technical Committee at each of the two CIWP pilot areas, to involve all stakeholders, from Provincial, District and Village government bodies and non government organizations. The PCC would supervise the project activities at site level, in line with the Project document and directions from the PSC, and would also coordinate all stakeholder inputs to a common work plan. Such formal Project Committees did not appear to be active at either of the two

⁴ No records of TPR meetings were viewed by the MTE.

⁵ The MTE received copies of PSC meeting minutes for 2007 and 2008 (June and December meetings) although all but one record was available in Farsi only.

pilot sites at the time of the MTE. Instead, the PCO has developed liaison mechanisms with each active stakeholder group, involving CIWP Site Coordinators and Assistants appointed at the two pilot sites.

38. The MTE finds these supervision arrangements for the CIWP to be satisfactory, but that there are a number of issues concerning decision-making, consultative and coordination mechanisms, at both national and pilot site levels, that should be resolved for the next phase of the project. The MTE is concerned that, in the work of the Project, PSC and TC to date, there is not an adequate, clear distinction made between supervision of the CIWP Project (e.g. approval of plans and budgets; major project changes) and governance of integrated management of wetland resources in Iran (involving coordinated, collaborative actions by multiple organizations). At present the thinking seems to be that the PSC is somehow responsible for both functions, whereas the MTE considers that it is an *ad hoc* body solely for the CIWP, and that there should be a permanent body with the mandate of governing wetland conservation in general.
39. A related issue is that “ownership” of the CIWP is not sufficiently clear to many of the organizations involved in wetlands conservation and management in Iran: the CIWP is regarded and promoted primarily as a UNDP and GEF project, and secondarily as a Department of Environment project: there appears to be little sense of ownership of the project by other national or Provincial stakeholders. (The Project Document (2004) also suggests in several parts that UNDP will have direct line supervision over project implementation, which seems inappropriate to the MTE). There are indications elsewhere in the Project Document of the designers’ intention that Project activities would be implemented by several government and non-government organizations, coordinated by Project staff and paid for, at least partially, from the Project budget. Such an arrangement is indicated in the specifications for the PSC in the Project Document, which states that each participating government organization will appoint two senior representatives to the PSC: the “Official PSC representative” would be “a high-level government official who would serve as the official representative of (the) participating institution” and “participate in project oversight and governance”; plus “a second representative, nominated by each institution as an ‘Institutional Focal Point’ who will be a working level, technical counterpart... providing day-to-day collaboration, technical input and coordination to the Project team as and when necessary... participating more actively and substantively on behalf of his/her institution in the technical aspects of the project... and in project activities and events as called upon.” The main responsibility of the IFP is “to support project implementation within his/her institution...”. This suggests again that the PSC would somehow become the governing body for both the Project and a broader inter-agency program of wetland conservation, which does not seem satisfactory to the MTE.
40. The PSC has not been operating clearly in either of these directions. There does not appear to be formal supervision or direction of CIWP actions by Committee consensus. Most PSC members are technical experts from their respective government organizations rather than high level managers; there are a large number of organizations represented; and the PSC appears to act primarily as an inter-agency liaison and coordinating mechanism on matters relating to project activities, rather than as the CIWP’s supervisory body. There was discussion at the PSC meeting held during the MTE about the efficiency and effectiveness of the Committee; how many and which agencies should be represented; and whether representatives should be experts or managers.
41. The Project Document emphasises elsewhere a central role for the DoE in project supervision and implementation, as well as in the overall program of wetlands conservation. The DoE was required to appoint as National Project Manager (NPM)⁶ “the individual in

⁶ The same section of the Project Document goes on to say that “The PCU will be led by a full-time National Project Director (NPD)”. The MTE considers that this is an error in the PD; that these references to the NPM and NPD have been inter-changed.

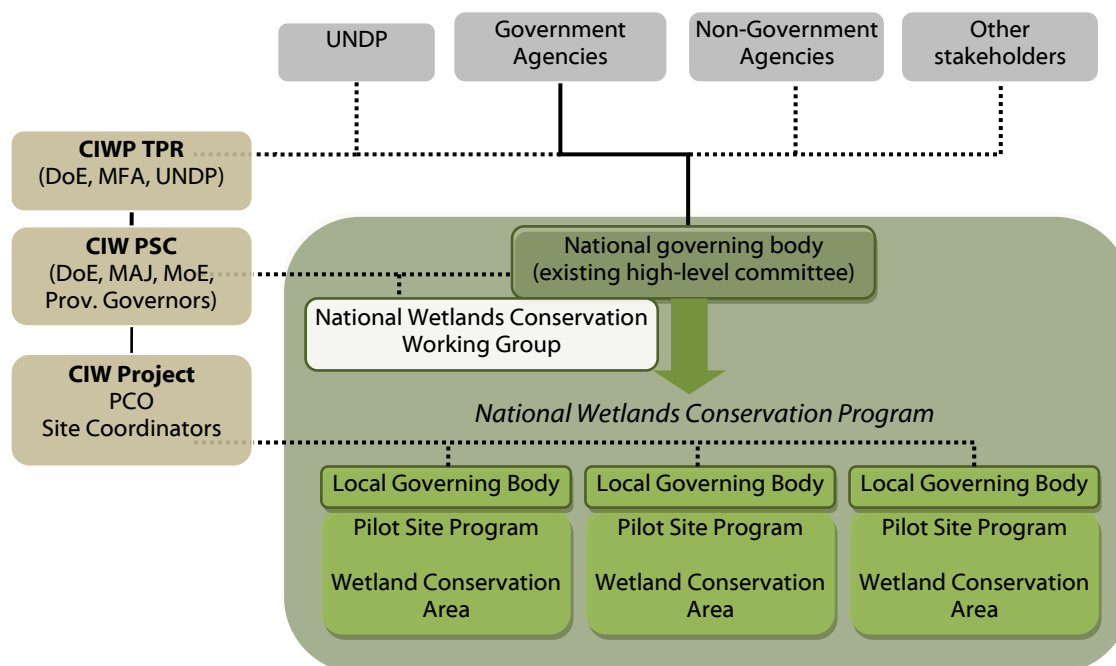
charge of the main implementing unit within DoE or that individual's direct supervisor". In fact, the NPD is the Deputy Head of the Department, responsible for a broad section of the Department as well as a number of internationally-supported biodiversity projects; the NPM is not a DoE line manager but is employed under a project-specific contract with UNDP; the DoE "wetlands unit" is not actually involved directly in the project's wetland actions; the project itself is somehow the implementing unit but is outside the main line structure of DoE, and liaises with several sections of the Department as well as other government offices.

42. The **MTE recommends (Rec 2.)** that there should be two separate national bodies, one temporary and one permanent, with distinct functions. The type of governance and management arrangements that may be suitable are illustrated in **figure 2**. The CIWP Project should work as an outside entity in an off-line capacity, facilitating the development of the pilot area programs, which contribute to the establishment of a national wetlands conservation program under a national governing mechanism:
- The Project Steering Committee should be responsible for supervising project implementation, nationally and at the pilot sites, and for efficiency should be linked closely (or integrated) with the TPR. There should not be separate project supervisory committees at the pilot sites. PSC membership should be limited to the few key national government agencies and Provincial Governors' offices participating directly in the CIWP. The CIWP should be regarded as jointly owned by the PMC member organizations, and should not be promoted as primarily a UNDP GEF project (or solely a DoE project). The PMC-TPR should meet annually to receive the formal progress report from the project, and approve the next year's plan and budget, and any major proposed changes to the project. Members should report back to their respective organisations regarding the actions their organizations will be taking under the umbrella of the project; and each organization's actions under the project should be subject to the scrutiny and direction of the PSC.
 - A National Wetlands Conservation Working Group should be convened as the coordinating body for wetlands-related work undertaken by any agency, unilaterally or jointly, inside or outside the CIWP Project, including responsibility for development of a national wetlands conservation system and program, facilitated by the CIWP (Outcome 3). The NWC Working Group could be part of or work under the auspices of an existing relevant high-level government committee, commission or council (labelled as National governing body in **figure 2**). The NPM and PCO could serve as secretariat to the Working Group or support the DoE in this function, and should maintain routine electronic communications among its members as well as organising occasional meetings as required. There is further discussion in paragraphs 98-100 of this report about strengthening the coordination of wetlands-related activities and the governance of a national wetlands conservation system.

Project Management & Implementation Arrangements

43. The main organizational unit for CIWP management, administration and implementation is the Project Central Office, housed within the DoE in Tehran, and headed by the National Project Manager (NPM), with a Deputy and 4 other members of technical and administrative support staff. The project staff are supplemented by a number of part-time consultants, recruited nationally and internationally. There are also Project Site Offices managing the two pilot areas: for Lake Parishan site, the project has a Site Coordinator and office at the Fars Province Governor's offices in Shiraz and an Assistant in an office at the Kazerun District Governor's offices in Kazerun city. For Lake Uromiyeh site, there is a Site Coordinator and Assistant in an office at the Tabriz headquarters of the East Azerbaijan Province Governor, and a Site Coordinator and Assistant on secondment from and with an office at the West Azerbaijan Provincial DoE. These arrangements are shown in **table 7**.

Figure 2: MTE-suggested arrangements for separate governance of the CIW Project and wetlands conservation in Iran



44. The project staff and national consultants are hired on individual service contracts with NPD/ DoE; 2 of the Site Coordinators and Assistants are working for the project on secondment from and paid for by the Provincial DoE. International consultants are hired by UNDP on Special Service Agreements (SSA). The project's progress reports show that considerable time has been spent on recruitment of suitable individual staff and consultants, and that in addition there was a rapid turnover of senior project management – 3 NPDs, 3 NPMs, 3 Deputy NPMs – in the first two years, as a result of recruitment and retention problems and of national elections and change in government in 2005-06. This resulted in very slow progress being made with getting the CIWP started and operating effectively.

Table 7: Project Offices and Staff

Offices	Staff complement
Project Central Office at DoE, Tehran	National Project Manager Deputy National Project Manager Public Awareness & Communications Coordinator Finance officer Technical Assistant Technical Assistant Drought Risk Coordinator ⁷ (vacant position) Assistants (2 vacant positions)
Lake Parishan Project Office at Provincial Governor's Office, Shiraz and District Governor's Office, Kazerun	Site Coordinator Site Assistant
Lake Uromiyeh Project Office at Governor's office, Tabriz, and at DoE, Uromiyeh	Site Coordinator, West Azerbaijan Site Coordinator, East Azerbaijan Site Assistant, West Azerbaijan Site Assistant, East Azerbaijan

⁷ The position of Drought Risk Coordinator is to be responsible for coordinating the actions planned under an additional Drought Risk Management sub-project funded in 2008 by UNDP Iran.

Consultants (International & National)	1 Senior International Project Advisor (I) 2 Protected Areas & Institutional Arrangements (I & N) 2 Integrated Water Resources Management (I & N) 2 Socio-Economics (I & N) 1 Sustainable Agriculture (N) 2 Biodiversity (I & N) 1 Wetland Mapping (I)
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45. The MTE was impressed with the CIWP staff and consultants who were met during the mission. They appear to be a dedicated and competent team with excellent leadership. They are well-organised and motivated to make good progress through the second half of the project. Over this period, it will be important that the project team is able to consolidate what it has achieved in the past two years and not become stretched too thinly by trying to make up for lost time and taking on too many additional tasks.
46. The project has established good working facilities in its various offices in Tehran, Shiraz, Kazerun, Tabriz and Uromiyeh, with office management systems for information, communications, records and reporting. The project offices appear to be administered efficiently and provide a good working environment for the staff. Procurement of equipment appears to be managed soundly, using a combination of UNDP and DoE services as required. The MTE was advised that the only issue of note is the continuing failure to secure the release from Iranian Customs authorities of vehicles purchased for the CIWP by UNDP with project funds. Clearly, this has reduced the efficiency of project implementation and is highly unsatisfactory for a 7-year project that is in its 5th year, and the MTE urges DoE to take steps to expedite the vehicles' release.
47. Based on advice that the CIWP staff are on a lower pay scale than those working on comparable Iranian UNDP-supported projects and those working with equivalent responsibility in government organizations, the **MTE recommends (Rec 3.1)** that following the MTE, pay and benefits should be reviewed and brought into line as far as possible with those of equivalent positions. As importantly, the CIWP should invest in preparing an adequate professional development plan for its staff members, which should anticipate the finite term of the project and consider options that may be available for each individual and for the team as a whole to continue their work in a related capacity.
48. The Project Document and Brief placed a heavy reliance on consultants rather than full-time technical staff; a total of 19 internationally-recruited consultants were detailed, each as a counterpart to a national consultant. Fortunately in the MTE's view, this plan was not followed; the project has employed less than half this number. The MTE considers that this remains an issue however, as the part-time expert consultants do not strengthen the project team's capacity to implement the project; the consultants work as off-line advisors and trainers, and the role of the project staff in both the PCO and field/site offices tends to be reduced to administering the consultants' activities. The **MTE recommends (Rec 3.2)** that as part of re-confirming the Outputs to be achieved over the second half of the project, there should be a reassessment of the requirements for full-time technical staff, and steps taken to increase the number and capacities of the core staff and reduce the number of part-time, off-line consultants.
49. A weakness observed in the CIWP management arrangements is the relatively low capacity of the project field/ site offices, which has resulted in the majority of project actions being planned, organized and managed from the PCO and by consultants. A general principle is that it is advantageous to manage operations from a position close to the action, and while recognizing that one of the Site Coordinators is a new appointee, the MTE considers that more responsibility for implementation of the project at the two pilot sites should be delegated to the field offices rather than being delivered from Tehran.

50. The **MTE recommendation (Rec 3.3)** is to develop the capacities of the field offices for each pilot site, with the aim of enabling the Site Coordinators and Assistants to manage all project activities at the sites, with support and reinforcement drawn as required from the PCO or consultants. This capacity development should be done by delegation, allocation of resources, and on-the-job briefings and learning, to develop the necessary capacities in planning, facilitation, leadership, coordination and collaboration. In making such adjustments, it is important for the PCO and PSC to remember that the prime function of the field site offices is to facilitate the strengthening of the institution(s) that are intended to govern and manage integrated wetland ecosystem conservation in the two areas in the long term. If the field site offices can be strengthened to take on a greater role in facilitating the pilot areas programs, it should enable the PCO team to focus greater attention on the tasks of drawing lessons from the pilots, confirming the new types of wetland conservation that are being tested and, in line with Outcome 3, promoting and facilitating establishment of a new national system and programs for wetland conservation and biodiversity conservation in general throughout Iran. Each of these tasks will require more attention and resources at the pilot site offices and the PCO in the second half of the project than they have received to date.
51. The key to successful facilitation of the CIWP pilot and demonstration activities will be to mobilize efficiently and effectively the permanent institutions that will form the new system and be the main implementers of the new management approaches for wetland conservation. The MTE is concerned that to date the project itself has retained too much responsibility for and ownership of the new system and the management activities that are being piloted. In order to transfer ownership, it is important for the new institutional arrangements to be clearly defined, established and brought into operation as soon as possible in the process. Refer to **MTE recommendation 5**.

Project and Program Linkages

52. An important consideration for any assistance project is its interconnectedness with other projects and broader, longer-term strategies and programs. The Project Document notes that the CIWP was designed with reference to the GEF's global program objectives, under its Operational Program 2, Coastal, Marine & Freshwater Ecosystems, and as a contribution to GEF Strategic Priorities I, Catalysing Sustainability for Protected Areas, and II, Mainstreaming Biodiversity in Production Systems. The design was also aligned with UNDP Iran's country program, to the extent that a new Goal, sub-Goal, intended Outcome, and Strategic Area of Support were defined for the Project Document, specifically to be consistent with the draft United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and UNDP's draft Country Program for Iran (2005-2009).
53. In addition, the CIW Project was intended to contribute to Iran's national programming, especially the National Development Plans (NDP) and relevant current national strategies such as the National Biodiversity Strategy & Action Plan (NBSAP). The first STAP review commented that only a "meagre" effort was made to identify national policies and plans for which the project was relevant, suggesting that those designing the CIWP could have been more pro-active in ensuring a clear strategic connection between project and national conservation agenda.
54. The 5-Year NDPs are the major vehicle for policy formulation and implementation by the Government of Iran, and it is important for the project's planned actions on policy reform to be fully consistent with the NDPs and therefore contributing to the government's agenda. The long gestation period of the CIWP, from 1998 to 2006, extended over three NDP cycles, from the 2nd NDP (1995-1999) to the 4th NDP (2005-2009). The Project Brief (2003) records that the 3rd NDP included two major paragraphs on environmental policy, drawn from the NBSAP, to address "sustainable use of natural resources, environmental liability, greening of industries, EIA, etc." More significantly, the 4th NDP, which was prepared at the same time as the CIWP, proposed introduction of ecosystem-based approaches to the management of

natural resources, biodiversity and environmental issues, which is a key objective of the project with respect to wetlands. Refer also to **MTE recommendation 8**.

55. The Project Brief notes that the NBSAP was compiled with the support of UNDP and a GEF Enabling Activity grant but does not contain any direct reference to wetlands conservation. The Project Brief nominated the following specific linkages between the project plan and the NBSAP as evidence that the CIWP design was “Country-driven”: Public awareness and participation; Biodiversity information systems; Sustainable use of natural resources; and Integrated biodiversity conservation. The MTE notes that there has been little or no further reference made to the NBSAP during CIWP implementation.
56. The Project Brief and Document also acknowledge other projects which coincided with and to varying extents contributed to the preparation of the CIWP. Notably, (i) the Irrigation Improvement Project undertook environmental and socio-economic studies and prepared a draft management plan for Lake Uromiyeh and its overall Basin; and (ii) a UNDP project built capacity for management of the EIA process in Iran. Other projects have parallel objectives and are producing results and lessons relevant to the CIWP. See **table 8**.

Table 8: Other Projects noted as relevant to the CIWP

Strengthening of EIAs	UNDP, DoE	YrX to 2003
NBSAP Enabling Activity	UNDP GEF, DoE	
Irrigation Improvement Project (IIP)	World Bank, FAO	1994 to 2002
Integrated Water Resources Management for Lake Uromiyeh Basin	Netherlands Government, MoE	2004 to 2005
Caspian Environment Program	UNDP GEF, UNEP, WB, EU	2004 to 2008
- Coastal Lagoon Adaptive Management Initiative		
Sustainable Management of Land & Water Resources	FRWO, UNDP	2005 to 2010
- inter-agency and multi-sector institutional coordination mechanism for river basin management		
Central Zagros Landscape Conservation Project	UNDP GEF, DoE	2005 to 2010
Conservation of the Asiatic Cheetah in Iran	UNDP GEF, DoE	2001 to 2008
National Capacity Self Assessment for Environmental Management - Iran	UNDP GEF	2005 to 2008
Persistent Organic Pollutants Enabling Activity	-	2003 to 2008
Strategic Environmental Assessment Capacity Building	UNDP, DoE	2006 to 2010
Sistan Basin management	-	-
Lessons for lake management	World Bank	-
Pakistan Wetlands Project	GoP, UNDP-GEF, WWF	-
Conservation & sustainable use of wetlands, Nepal	GoN, UNDP-GEF	-

Project Finances – Budget and Expenditure

57. The CIW Project was designed with a total budget of \$11.75 million to fund implementation over the planned 7-year duration. The two sources of funds are from the Government of Iran (National, \$8.835 m), and the Global Environment Facility (GEF, \$2.915 m). An additional \$0.4 m was provided for the project design work, in the form of PDF grants from the GEF through UNDP. The Project Brief (2003) and Document (2004) refer to an existing project with a budget of \$600,000 from the Netherlands Government as co-financing for the CIWP, but which was largely completed before the CIWP had started.
58. The planned annual disbursements to the project budget from the GEF and National funding sources are shown in **table 9** drawn from the Inception Report (2006). This budget plan proposed disbursements of around 10% (\$1.2m) of the budget in Year 2 (2006), and roughly twice this amount (16-19%, around \$2m) annually for Years 3 to 7 (2007 to 2011).

The plan also indicated that virtually no activity will take place in 2005, with less than 1% of the funds (\$85,000) being allocated. However, it should be noted that this plan was drawn at the end of the Inception Phase, in 2006, and that the 2005 figure is therefore of actual expenditure rather than proposed budget as stated. In other words, following very low expenditure in Year 1, 2005, the remaining funds (99.3% of the total) were simply re-allocated between the remaining six years, 2006 to 2011. The MTE considers that it would have been preferable if the Inception Report had proposed that as the whole of 2005 was largely unproductive, it should be written off as “Year 0” and the funds allocated across a further 7 years, 2006 to 2012. This would have provided the project with a more realistic timetable and annual budgets. Refer to **MTE recommendation 11** on project extension.

Table 9: CIW Project – Annual Budget Plan

Project Budget (US\$ thousands)	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Totals
GEF funds	55	600	580	480	400	400	400	2,915
National funds	30	580	1,260	1,675	1,830	1,785	1,675	8,835
Totals	85	1,180	1,840	2,155	2,230	2,185	2,075	11,750

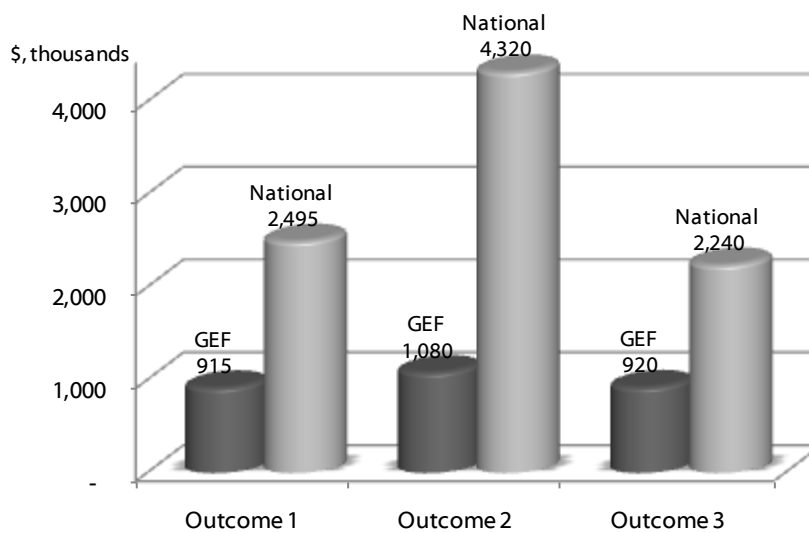
Source: Inception Report (2006)

59. A significant feature of the CIWP budget plan is the high proportion of National funds, amounting to 75% of the total compared to 25% from the GEF. The annual budget plan (**table 9**) indicates that 60% of the GEF funds and 40% of the National funds are to be spent in the first half (2005-2008) of the project implementation period, while in the second half (2009-2011), the pattern will be reversed, with the balance of 40% of GEF funds and 60% of National funds to be disbursed. Unfortunately, no documents were available to the MTE on the calculations and negotiations that led to this unusual project budget plan, apart from a reference in the Project Brief to GEF funds being scarce at that time, which may have led to the GEF budget being reduced from \$9m to \$3m, and thus the high proportion of Government co-financing for the project. Refer to **Annex IV.1**
60. The MTE considers that the efficiency of project implementation has suffered from the lack of systematic budget planning, management and documentation: notably, each of the Project Brief (2003), Project Document (2004) and Project Inception Report (2006) have not been fully clear or complete with respect to planned budget details. Refer to **Annex IV.2** for details. In the absence of clarity and consistency in Project Document and Inception Report, the budget presented in **table 10** is drawn from the earlier Project Brief. It indicates the allocation of funds from each source to each of the 15 planned Outputs. Based on the same data, the planned allocation of the GEF and National funds to the three CIWP Outcomes is illustrated in **figure 3** below: this highlights the high proportion of National funding, and the allocation of nearly 50% of National funding to Outcome 2, and roughly 25% to each of Outcomes 1 and 3, compared to roughly equal portions of GEF funding being allocated to each of the three Outcomes.

Table 10: CIW Total Project Budget, National and GEF funds

“Outcomes and Sub-Outcomes” (in US\$ thousands)	GEF funds	National	Total
1. WPA management	915	2,495	3,410
1.1 Government agency capacity development	135	45	180
1.2 Threat assessment	165	70	235
1.3 Public awareness and participation	125	165	290
1.4 Site management and enforcement	300	1,349	1,649
1.5 Wetland habitat protection & restoration	190	866	1,056
2. Inter-sectoral co-ordination	1,080	4,320	5,400
2.1 Coordination mechanisms	425	2,620	3,045
2.2 Integrated water resources management	200	650	850
2.3 Integrated pollution control	110	450	560
2.4 Sustainable land use	90	400	490

2.5 Environmental impact assessment	150	100	250
2.6 Invasive species control	105	100	205
3. National management co-ordination	920	2,240	3,160
3.1 DoE capacity development	400	130	530
3.2 Sectoral ministries and national co-ordination strengthened	120	35	155
3.3 Public awareness ⁸	-	-	-
3.4 Replication sites	400	2,075	2,475
Sub Totals	2,915	9,055	11,970

Source: Project Brief (2003)⁹**Figure 3: CIW Project Outcome Budget – GEF and National financing (\$,000)**

61. The distribution of funds between Outputs in the Project Brief budget (**table 10**) provides a good indication of the anticipated focus required of the project: significant funding is allocated in particular to each of the following four major, high cost, planned Outputs, which together account for 76% of the total project budget, 83% of the National funds:

Output 1.4 Site management & enforcement	\$1.649m (14% of total budget)
Output 1.5 Habitat protection & restoration	\$1.056m (9%)
Output 2.1 Coordination	\$3,045m (25%)
Output 3.4 Replication sites	\$2,475m (21%).

62. As noted above, it is unfortunate that documentation on the budget is not available, to understand the calculations that went into these significant budget allocations. The allocation of over 21% (\$2.475m) of the total budget to Output 3.4 seems likely to prove to be a reasonable figure, as it must cover the main costs of implementing the “replication strategy” for the new model of wetland conservation area to be introduced nationally. On the other hand, allocation of \$2.6m of National funds to Output 2.1 is of concern, as it amounts to 29% of the total National budget, and makes it by far the most expensive Output, inexplicably for establishment of “inter-sectoral governance mechanisms” in the two pilot basins of Lake Uromiyeh and Lake Parishan.

63. The explanation for the large amount of funding may lie in the scale of Lake Uromiyeh and its basin, extending over nearly 52,000 sq.km across the 3 Provinces of East and West Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, and in the level of national concern over the deteriorating

⁸ The budget plan, **table 10**, shows zero budget allocation to 3.3 Public awareness-raising, as this Output was added only at the Inception Phase, at which time no detailed revised budget was prepared.

⁹ The Project Brief and the Inception Report specify National funds of \$9.055m and 8.84m respectively. The discrepancy may be due to the latter not including funds spent on project formulation.

ecological condition of the Lake and its basin. The Project Brief proposes what may now be considered a fairly grand and expensive solution: “a permanent Lake Uromiyeh Basin Management Authority (LUBMA)... a Federal-level institution with supra-ministerial, supra-provincial authority to decide on and enforce key water and land use issues within the LUB... with adequate facilities, staffing levels and operating budget...” The MTE considers that a high level of additional funding may not be necessary, and is not desirable if it sets an unrealistic precedence for the on-going costs of the new management model for wetland conservation being promoted by the CIWP. The National budget should be reviewed carefully as part of confirming the full Outputs budget for the remaining period of the Project. Refer to **MTE recommendation 1**.

64. At the end of 2008, apparently for the first time since the Project Brief was written, a revised budget was prepared (see **table 11**), based on the Outputs planned over the remainder of the project, although only for the balance of GEF funds. This Outputs budget plan was based on the revised logical framework (LF) prepared at the same time, which combined and reduced the number of substantive outputs from 15 to 7 (plus 2 new ones for Project management and M&E costs). Unfortunately, there had been no strategic Outputs-based budget planning since the Project Brief was prepared in 2003, and consequently no monitoring of the project’s expenditure on each Output and no adaptive management over the first four years of the project. It is therefore difficult to comment on the appropriateness or otherwise of the 2009-2011 budget plan for the reformulated Outputs, especially as it does not include the National funds. The MTE considers that the 2008 revisions to the LF and budget plan lost rather too much detail, with most of the 7 new Outputs being too broad (refer to discussion on Project Design). As a result of this loss of detail, the value of the new Outputs budget plan is of less utility for management and M&E purposes.

Table 11: CIW Project Revised Budget, 2009-2011 GEF funds only

	\$	2009	2010	2011	Totals
Output 1.1		120,000	107,000	55,000	282,000
Output 1.2		100,000	80,000	20,000	215,000
Outcome 1		220,000	187,000	75,000	497,000
Output 2.1		30,000	17,000	10,000	57,000
Output 2.2		30,000	35,000	20,000	85,000
Outcome 2		60,000	52,000	30,000	142,000
Output 3.1		25,000	20,000	5,000	50,000
Output 3.2		75,000	110,000	65,000	250,000
Output 3.3		15,000	40,000	5,000	60,000
Outcome 3		115,000	170,000	75,000	360,000
Output 4.1		150,000	180,000	205,000	535,000
Output 4.2		25,000		25,000	50,000
Outcome 4		175,000	180,000	230,000	585,000
TOTALS		570,000	589,000	410,000	1,584,000

Source: PCO May 2009

65. The revised GEF budget plan for 2009-2011 proposes annual expenditures that are over 40% higher than those in the original budget plan (refer to **tables 9 & 10** above). The revision did not take into account the slow start to the project and slow rates of implementation and expenditure, but merely divided the balance of GEF funds remaining at the end of 2008 (\$1.584 m) into three, for the final 3 years, 2009-2011, of the original project plan. In addition, no account is given of the National budget for the revised outputs for the same period, which by this stage of the project was intended to be more than four times the GEF budget.
66. Management of the CIWP budget is additionally complicated because of the differences between the National and GEF budget cycles and financial management procedures. The GEF funds are disbursed from UNDP to DoE and the PCO on a quarterly basis, against an

annual budget plan that runs from January to December, and using the ATLAS system which works according to a standard set of budget lines for each Outcome. National funds are requested by the PCO from government accounts via the DoE, to pay for a set of planned activities, on an annual basis, running from July to June. As a result of these two different procedures and cycles, there has been little or no strategic management of either budget – for example, by allocating funds to and tracking expenditure on key results or Outputs – and in the view of the MTE, the efficiency and effectiveness of the CIWP work program has been reduced.

CIWP Expenditure

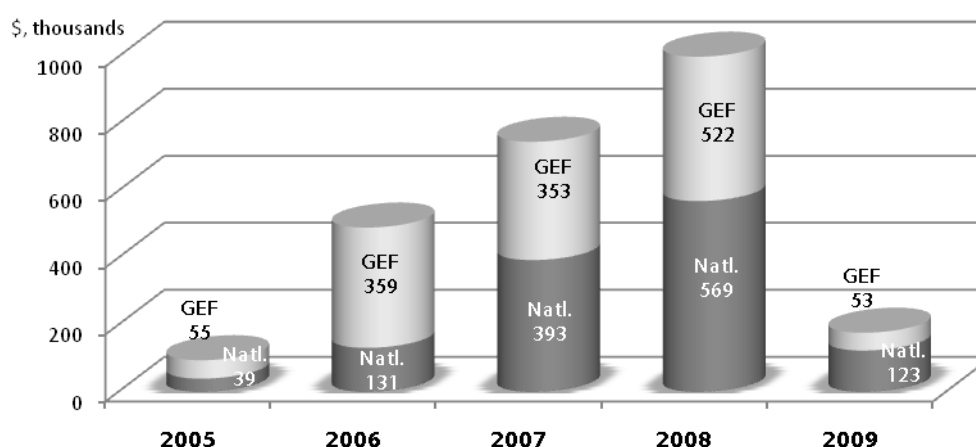
67. CIWP expenditure data is summarised in **table 12**. Total expenditure to date (to the end of Q1 2009) is \$2.598m (22% of the \$11.970m total budget), comprising \$1.341m of GEF funds (46% of \$2.915m) and \$1.257m of National funds (14% of \$9.055m). Expenditure of the National budget is on a mixture of cash and in-kind items. Expenditure on Outcome 1 is \$1.32m (39% of the planned budget); on Outcome 2 is \$0.28m (just 5% of planned budget); and on Outcome 3 is \$1.00m (32%). The same figures are shown in **figure 4**, CIWP expenditure to date, by source and year; and in **figure 5**, CIWP expenditure on each of the 3 Outcomes.
68. No more detailed expenditure data is monitored by the PCO or was available to the MTE. Of particular concern is the lack of a system to monitor expenditure against the planned budget for each Output, and make annual adjustments to the remaining budget.

Table 12: CIW Project Budget & Annual Expenditure, by source and year

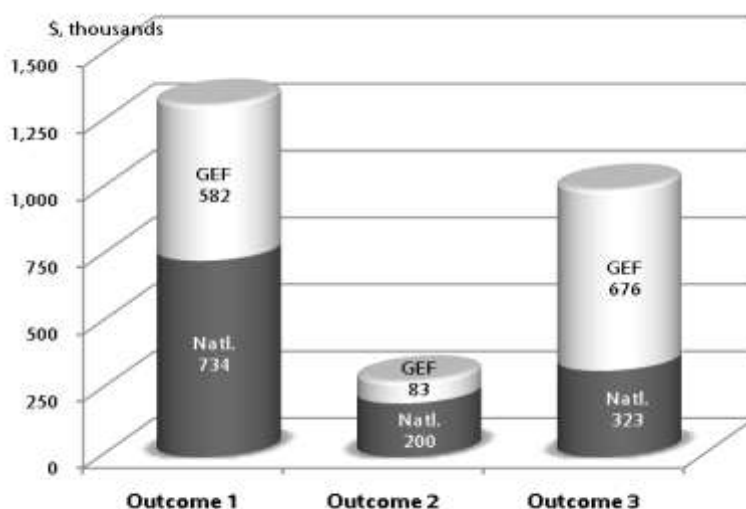
Component US\$,000	Budget		Expenditure						Balance	
	Source		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009 ¹⁰	Total		%
Outcome 1	GEF	915	55	187	135	196	10	582	64%	333
	National	2,495	8	65	242	373	46	734	29%	1,761
Outcome 2	GEF	1,080	0	22	12	43	5	83	8%	997
	National	4,320	5	20	56	109	11	200	5%	4,120
Outcome 3	GEF	920	0	150	205	283	37	676	73%	245
	National	2,240	27	46	96	87	67	323	14%	1,917
Totals	GEF	2,915	55	359	353	522	53	1,341	46%	1,574
	National	9,055	39	131	394	569	123	1,257	14%	7,798
		11,970	94	490	746	1,091	176	2,598	22%	9,372

Compiled for the MTE from several sources

Figure 4: CIWP Expenditure to date, by source and year



¹⁰ 2009 Q1 expenditure data only

Figure 5: CIWP Expenditure to date, by Outcome

69. The rate of expenditure is low, considering that the 7-year project is at its mid-point: 62% of the project's time has passed from the official start-date of January 2005. There were significant delays in expenditure in the first 3 years, with virtually no expenditure in 2005, inception year, and low expenditures in 2006 and 2007, even of the GEF budget: only \$712,000 of GEF funds were spent, 60% of the two annual budgets of \$1.18m. For the same two years, the National budget was \$1.840m, but only \$0.525m (29%) were spent. In the last full year of accounting, 2008, combined expenditure had risen to \$1.09m, but this was still only 51% of the planned budget of \$2.16m for that year.
70. Total expenditure of 46% of the GEF funds by the "mid-point" of the project is more-or-less on target. However, expenditure on Outcome 2 is seriously off-target, with only 8% of the GEF budget for this Outcome having been spent to date. Expenditure of GEF funds on Outcome 1 and 3 is slightly over budget, with 64% and 73% respectively having been spent.
71. Of the significant National funding for the project, only 14% has been mobilized to date, \$1.257m of the \$9.055m budget. The rate of expenditure has been highest on Outcome 1, for which 29% of the National budget has been spent, compared to 14% of the National budget for Outcome 3 and just 5% of the National budget for Outcome 2. The MTE considers that it is now too late in the project to try to rectify this slow expenditure: even with an extension of the project by one year, to the end of 2012, the project would need to mobilize over \$2.2m of National funding each year, more than twice the amount of National funds that it has managed to mobilize in the past 3 full years combined.
72. The principal cause of the slow expenditure appears to have been the lack of strategic management of the project budget and implementation. As noted above, the project has not been able to make adequate use of the project logical framework to plan and drive implementation of its strategic results (Outputs) or the budget and expenditure. In addition, there have been particular problems with the lack of a clear plan for the National budget and the lack of straightforward mechanisms for the PCO, DoE and other government organizations to requisition funds against this plan and implement actions.
73. The PCO (and presumably the PSC and TPR) has tended to discount the project plan and budget plan and to rely on the notion that expenditure of the National funds would increase significantly in the latter part of the project, when the management plans, developed for the two pilot areas in the first half, will start to be implemented. The MTE considers that this is a mistake; that the planned budget needed to be spent on implementing the project plan; and that management of the two pilot sites needs to be

implemented progressively, incrementally, rather than waiting for a management plan to be “completed” before “implementation” starts.

74. In the light of these several factors, the **MTE recommends (Rec 4.1)** that the PCO must overhaul its system for budget planning and expenditure monitoring:
- It should put in place its own simple spreadsheet-based system to plan the allocation of funds and to monitor expenditure, from each source to each (re-confirmed) Output, for each quarter and 6-month period.
 - Working on a rolling 6-month cycle should enable the project to cope with the two off-set annual cycles of the two sources of funds (National and UNDP-GEF).
 - Funds requested and received at the PCO from each source must be translated each way from and into the project’s Outputs-based budget, rather than trying to make do with the simple ATLAS chart of accounts.
 - Further revisions should be made to the Outputs, work plans and budget requirements (from both sources) for the remainder of the project, in order to confirm a realistic schedule and rate of disbursement for the project to reach satisfactory completion; it is now too late in the project to try to rectify the slow expenditure of the National funds.
 - There are sufficient remaining GEF and National funds, and sufficient work to be done, to extend the CIWP budget by at least one full year, to the end of 2012.
75. More fundamentally, the **MTE recommends (Rec 4.2)** that a thorough review and revision of the National budget for the CIWP should be made by the PCO and PSC, following confirmation of the new institutional and long-term funding arrangements to be put in place for the new model of wetland conservation areas and basin management programs that are being piloted by the project. The MTE notes that until the new model system for wetlands conservation has been confirmed and carefully costed, it will not be possible to confirm the National budget required for the CIWP, and it would certainly not be appropriate to attempt to allocate the 86% balance of the National funds to the remaining 3 or so years of the project.

Project Monitoring and Evaluation

76. The CIW Project Document and Brief outline the plan for monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the project’s progress, based on the roles and requirements of the GEF and UNDP, the TPR, the Executing Agency DoE, and project management. The main elements of the plan are quarterly and annual reports and reviews, independent mid-term and final evaluations, and ad hoc technical reviews, each of which should be made with reference to the overall project plan, logical framework and budget, and detailed annual work plans and budgets. The MTE observed that the majority of this plan has been followed diligently since 2006-2007, with reports on administrative, financial and technical matters prepared routinely by the NPM and PCO for the NPD, PSC, UNDP and the TPR.
77. However, there is a general weakness in the CIWP’s M&E procedures that stems from the lack of clear substantive objectives being written into the project’s plans – the overall logical framework, annual work plans, and individual activity plans. As noted under Project Design, the CIWP logical framework has not been sufficiently well developed to serve as the project’s principal tool for monitoring, information management, reporting and evaluation. Without clear objectives and indicators, it is difficult – for project managers, supervisors and evaluators – to evaluate the effectiveness of actions. Monitoring records and reports generated by the PCO do account for the various activities that were carried out over the reporting period, but cannot say whether or not they were successful or achieved the desired impact, because no substantive measures of success or impact were proposed.
78. The MTE comments on the CIWP design and logical framework in the Project Design section

and **table 5** of this report. **Recommendation 1** made under that section applies here also: M&E will be strengthened considerably by a careful review and confirmation of the major set of strategic results (Outputs) that CIWP plans to achieve; and by ensuring that each one is defined by a clear objective statement, measurable targets and possibly milestones, and one or two clear indicators; each should be reasonably SMART¹¹.

79. More generally, every action organized by the project should first be planned with a clearly specified objective and performance indicator(s). If each component, Output and action by the project is planned in this more rigorous way, it will enable its subsequent impacts to be measured. At a more basic level, it will also help the project to strengthen its monitoring, information management and reporting procedures, which would help to improve the efficiency of project management, including the efficient conduct of independent periodic audits and evaluations.
80. The principal reason for having a strong Monitoring & Evaluation mechanism is that it enables “adaptive management”; it provides the managers (project staff, consultant, NPM, NPD, PSC, TPR) with essential feedback on whether the management action was relevant and worked efficiently and effectively, or whether adjustments need to be made so that it is done better in the future, next time. In the absence of strong project M&E, there has been little adaptive management of the CIWP; similar actions have been implemented in largely the same ways each year, based on the original ideas and plans. The overall project plan, logical framework and budget were first written around 2003, but were not critically reviewed until the end of 2008, when some partial changes were made, adapting the next stage of the project plan to the changed circumstances. The MTE suggests that a more systematic approach to adaptive management should be adopted as a matter of routine by the PCO, NPD, DoE and PSC members, in order to reinforce and make the most of the CIWP as a pilot, demonstration and learning initiative for the stakeholders in Iranian wetlands.

¹¹ SMART: S – Specific [Significant]; M – Measurable [Meaningful]; A – Appropriate [Achievable, Agreed]; R – Realistic [Relevant]; T- Time-bound.

5. Implementation Progress and Achievements

81. This section of the MTE report reviews the progress of the project and the results that have been achieved to date. The review is organised with reference to the planned objectives that formed the project plan from 2004 until the end of 2008, of 3 Outcomes and 15 Outputs serving a single overall Project Objective.

Outcome 1 & Outcome 2: CIWP Pilot Areas

82. The first two components of the project are aimed at strengthening the management of two pilot wetland sites: Outcome 1 is focused on addressing the local issues affecting the immediate wetlands; while Outcome 2 is concerned with the broader range of threats to the wider ecosystem and the catchment surrounding the wetland.

Pilot site selection – Lake Uromiyeh and Lake Parishan

83. Lake Uromiyeh and Lake Parishan were selected during project formulation to be the CIWP pilot areas. The process and criteria used for selection of the two sites are described in the Project Brief (section 6.3), and involved a review of wetlands throughout Iran and assessment of their natural values and of the prevailing threats to their ecological health. The MTE notes that the comparative assessment gave special weight to high numbers of rare and threatened species present at the sites, on the basis of which the two sites were chosen. A threat analysis was carried out subsequently, but only for the two selected sites. Given the project design's emphasis on the management of threats to wetlands as the principal approach to be piloted, it would have been more useful to have selected pilot areas on the basis of the range, seriousness and perhaps tractability of prevailing threats. These criteria are of more relevance for selecting sites at which to pilot management solutions, than the number of endangered species.

84. Based on the information available in the project documents, of the two areas chosen, Lake Parishan appears to be the more typical Iranian Wetland Protected Area – in terms of its geography, ecology, patterns of resource use activities, prevailing threats, and legal management status. Lake Uromiyeh is atypical, given the size and nature of the lake, its "satellite wetlands", and the size of the surrounding basin, extending into three Provinces, coupled with the facts that little use is made of the lake itself by the large surrounding human population, and its biodiversity is not especially rich.

85. The MTE concludes that Lake Uromiyeh was selected because of its special-ness rather than its typical-ness. It considers that having Lake Uromiyeh as one of just two pilot areas has tended to divert the CIWP from its primary purpose of testing and demonstrating effective and replicable ways of managing wetlands and then extending lessons to a national system of new style wetland conservation areas.¹² There is clearly a risk that because of its scale, the LU pilot will take up a considerable proportion of the project's resources and time without reaching the stage of yielding major conclusive lessons for replication elsewhere. To counter this risk, project management should pay greater attention to the recording, documenting and evaluating interim and partial results and lessons to be learned from different components and elements of the LU pilot¹³. Refer to **MTE recommendation 9** on evaluating each aspect of the pilot programs.

86. After making only slow progress in 2005 and 2006, the project organised a range of activities and started producing results in 2007, 2008 and 2009, for each of the two pilot

¹² In this regard, the MTE's view differs from that expressed in the Project Brief, that "the selection of Lake Uromiyeh, which has a prominence and public recognition matched only by one other wetland in Iran... will clearly facilitate efforts to replicate and extend lessons learned at the site."

¹³ For example, the various "satellite wetlands" in Lake Uromiyeh basin provide good opportunities for testing a variety of approaches and techniques and evaluating them comparatively.

areas. The MTE compiled a preliminary list of the information it had gathered on the project's activities and achievements under Outcomes 1 and 2 at each of the pilot areas; in **table 13**, the different types of results are grouped into a number of categories, which serve to illustrate the process that the project is following at each pilot area, and are discussed below.

Table 13: Summary List of Activities & Achievements, Outcomes 1 & 2

Working Groups, 2007-2009	LU		Sustainable agriculture & land use working group
	LU		Sustainable water management working group
	LU	LP	Public awareness, participation & livelihoods working groups
	LU	LP	Biodiversity, conservation & sustainable use working groups
		LP	Land & water use working group
Community engagement	LU	LP	Wetland Festivals (2008)
		LP	NGO network formation
Studies/ Reports	LU		Economic evaluation (WA DoE, xxxx)
	LU		Report on irrigation efficiency pilot projects (xxxx)
	LU	LP	Hydrology reports (2007)
	LU	LP	Basin biodiversity reports (2007)
	LU		Report on IWRM scenarios (3 sub-basins, 2008)
	LU		Baseline map of human activities (2008)
		LP	PRA socio-economic studies (3 villages, 2007)
		LP	GIS maps (2008)
		LP	Bird survey (2008)
		LU	Atlas (to be published 2009)
Workshops, Planning/ Training	LU		IWRM workshop (2007)
	LU	LP	Wetland mapping & delineation workshops (2006)
	LU	LP	Management Planning workshop series (2007, 2008)
	LU	LP	Monitoring workshops (2008)
	LU	LP	Codes of Practice & zoning workshops (2008)
		LP	Participatory management workshop (2008)
		LP	Local community training (tourist guide, handicrafts, 2008)
		LP	Fisheries workshop (2009)
	LU		Gorigol management planning workshops (2008, 2009)
	LU		Kaniberazan initiation (2008)
-	-	[<u>Shadegan</u> inception & planning workshops (2008, 2009)]	
Institutional development		LP	Provincial Coordination Committee (2007)
	LU	LP	Technical Committees (2007)
	LU		Regional Basin Council (agreed, 2008)
Policy development	LU	LP	Management Plans (prepared and ratified, 2008)
	LU	LP	Monitoring plan and protocols (drafted, 2008)
	LU	LP	Zoning/ sensitivity map (drafted, 2008)
		LP	Action Plans (encroachment disputes, landscape protection, village environmental management; drafted 2009)
Site works	LU		Boundary markers installed (2008, 2009)
	LU	LP	WPA sign boards (2008, continuing)
		LP	Grazing enclosure fencing (planned, 2009)

LU, Lake Uromiyeh pilot area; LP, Lake Parishan pilot area

87. The project has organized a number of "inter-sectoral" **working groups** from among the various stakeholders active in the Province, District or local wetland area. The majority of participants are officials from local or Provincial government or from DoE, together with a small number of NGO members. The Working Groups are concerned with the main "sectors" of issues that are observed at each of the two wetland-basins. They form the major point of engagement with the CIWP and its consultants for officials from the different government departments. Through the WGs, individuals can confer with colleagues from other organizations, contribute to studies, receive training, and generally participate in the integrated program of work organized by the project.

88. The project appears to have done a good job in **raising awareness** of the issues facing the two pilot areas and wetlands in general, among the local communities, officials, political leaders and the general public. This work has been guided by stakeholder analyses prepared for each pilot area. There have been numerous meetings in the two areas with different groups of local, District and Provincial stakeholders. The PCO has produced and circulated a variety of communications and publicity materials, introducing and promoting the CIWP, but also, more importantly, the issues surrounding wetlands and their conservation. A major Lake Festival was organized in each area in 2008, apparently with great success; the project office believes that the two Festivals marked a distinct turning point in the levels of interest and attitudes towards the local areas' ecology and associated wetland and water resource issues.
89. A number of **technical studies and reports** have been prepared for the project by consultants over the past three years. These have generally been descriptions of the 'baseline' situation prior to project actions, and analyses of options for addressing issues; and they have provided resource materials for the various Working Groups and for training exercises. The MTE notes that the rather general topics of the studies – refer to **table 13** – do not match the more specific issues that are targeted in the project's planned Outputs (anthropogenic threats; wetland habitat destruction; pollution control; land use management; EIAs; invasive alien species).
90. The project has organized a number of **technical workshops** for officials from participating organizations in the two pilot areas; this has been the main strategy adopted by the project to both build capacity and to achieve multi-sectoral/ multi-agency inputs to management planning and decision-making for the two areas, through participatory processes. These appear to have been effective examples of "learning by doing"; and of participatory planning and management. As noted in **table 13**, the same approach is being used at the CIWP "replication site" of the Shadegan marshes in Khuzestan Province, started in 2008.
91. A number of **committees** have been proposed or are in the process of being established, as new bodies to take the lead in governing and operating the new, integrated style of management that is envisaged for the two pilot wetland areas. The two pilot areas differ markedly in their requirements, with 3 Provinces and several major interest groups involved in Lake Uromiyeh, compared to the single Fars Province and a narrower set of stakeholders in Lake Parishan.
92. The CIW project is relying heavily on the preparation of a **management plan** for each of the pilot areas, as the principal vehicle for defining and integrating the policies that will apply for governing and managing the new style of wetland conservation and sustainable use area. The most significant achievement of the project to date is to have facilitated the drafting of the LU and LP Management Plans and their ratification by National Cabinet in 2008. These plans contain a hierarchy of objectives, headed by an agreement (so far, only in the LU Plan) to work towards a common vision and conservation goal. It is intended that a series of specific action plans, protocols and codes will be added progressively to the Management Plans; the first of these were drafted in 2009 for the LP Management Plan.
93. **Table 13** lists the small number of "site works" that have been initiated to date under the new system that is being piloted. These on-ground actions include erection of sign boards at WPA sites in the two pilot areas, and the major task of installing concrete boundary markers at 400m intervals around the entire perimeter boundary of the Lake Uromiyeh National Park.

Outcome 3: National system development

94. CIWP planned Outcome 3 is a strengthened national system for wetland conservation in Iran, to be achieved by developing the national governance and coordination mechanisms for the two pilot areas and then replicating the lessons learned at other wetland sites and

basins across the country. Under this component, the project is to support the design and implementation of a national replication strategy for the new style of wetland conservation.

95. So far, the CIWP has directed its attention to the development of the two pilot areas, and relatively few actions have been taken towards Outcome 3. These have included a number of general briefings and training workshops for national government agency officials and dissemination of various generic guidelines for different aspects of wetlands management, as summarised in **table 14**. Another area of activity has been concerned with raising awareness about Iran’s wetlands, their values and conservation issues, among the general public, government officials and politicians.

Table 14: Summary List of Activities & Achievements, Outcome 3

Guidelines/ Reports	Principles and guidelines for buffer zones and wetland use (2008) National guidelines on wetlands monitoring (2008) Legislation & institutional arrangements baseline report (2007) IUCN guidelines on alien species (translation, 2009)
Training/ Workshops	Ecosystem-based management workshop (2007) Participatory watershed management workshop Med-Wet database training workshop (2007) S.E.A. workshop (MAJ, 2007) WPA national workshop (2008) CIWP – DoE Lessons sharing workshop (2009)
Awareness/ Communications	CIWP communication plan drafted (2007) “Wetlands awareness poll” conducted in 7 cities (2009)

MTE Findings & Recommendations:

96. From its brief review of activities and achievements under Outcomes 1, 2 and 3, the MTE concludes that the project had a slow start but that, since 2007, has organized a good program of work at each of the two pilot areas. Major emphasis has been placed on raising stakeholders’ understanding of the need to change approaches to the conservation of wetlands and the management of water and land-uses; integrated and participatory approaches have been promoted and introduced, through numerous briefings, study reports and other written communications, working group discussions, and planning workshops. The process has started to bear tangible results, as indicated in **tables 13 and 14**, in the form of new institutional arrangements, the two management plans, and some basic site works.
97. *Influencing attitudes and practices:* Judging by the reports received by the MTE and to a small extent by its own observations, one of the CIWP’s most important impacts has been to influence the attitudes of Iranian government officials, including key senior managers in the national and Provincial offices of DoE; the national Ministries of Agricultural Jihad and Energy and other national government offices such as the National Committee for Eco-Tourism; and in the Provincial and District Governors’ offices. In the past 2-3 years, there have apparently been major shifts in thinking among officials about how to manage and conserve natural resources – land, water and biodiversity; how to achieve ecological sustainability of uses; and how to protect wetlands and water resources from anthropogenic threats. The shifts can no doubt be attributed to several factors, including the persistent severe drought that is damaging wetlands and catchment basins across the country; as well as to the CIWP and its management team, for having built substantial credibility as a source of ideas, advice, support and potential solutions. The MTE concludes that there is now widespread understanding and recognition of what the CIWP is saying about the threats to wetlands and the need to change management and use patterns. The next step is to use this understanding to influence changes in policies, institutional arrangements and management practices, developments that are crucial for project Outcomes 1 & 2, for the two pilot wetland and basin areas governed largely by Provincial

and local authorities; and for Outcome 3, organization of national institutions, and replication of the new model of wetland conservation across the country.

98. *Wetlands governance & management institutions*: The underlying purpose of the CIWP is to test and introduce new, more effective arrangements for the management of wetland sites and governance of a national wetlands conservation system. The MTE is concerned that CIWP has been slow in facilitating the definition and development of the institutions and institutional mechanisms that are to be responsible for governing and managing the new style of wetland conservation and water basin management. The project has not yet prepared an adequate analysis or discussion paper on the various institutional and regulatory options available for more integrated forms of natural resources management in Iran. Well before this stage of the project, preferably during design and inception, there should have been serious discussions about the likely effectiveness of inter-agency committees and inter-agency “coordination”, and about the future structure and functions of DoE, in governing the integrated management of wetlands and catchments subject to diverse uses and impacts.
99. Up to now, this critical set of questions seems to have been treated rather naively by the project designers and managers and the PSC. The Project Brief talks about “enhanced coordination at all levels”, but the MTE considers that this is not going to be sufficient. Some respondents to the MTE did not seem to be thinking beyond strengthening the Department of Environment, assisting them to do a more effective job of managing Wetland Protected Areas, with a few improved tools and better “coordination” with other line Ministries. Some parts of the project plan give the same impression, that CIWP is really just a conventional capacity building project for the government protected areas agency. However, this contradicts the basic concept behind the project: that, especially for wetlands and their wide catchments, a conventional DoE protected area approach is ineffectual.
100. The MTE makes a strong **recommendation (Rec 5.)** that the long-term institutional arrangements for wetlands conservation – the agency(ies) that will set policy, integrate functions, resolve disputes, and lead joint actions in managing wetlands – should be formally defined and established as a matter of priority. As early as possible in the second half of the project, a careful analysis of the institutional issues and options for the new Iranian wetlands conservation system should be prepared and discussed, and an institutional reform and development plan agreed. The new institutional arrangements must be specified for governance, management and participation at local level (Outcome 1), basin/ Province-wide (Outcome 2) and national level (Outcome 3); clearly the three component Outcomes need to work closely together. The ways in which the DoE and key sectoral Ministries – Agricultural Jihad, Energy (and Water), Roads & Transportation – will collaborate and integrate their wetlands-related policies and programs need to be formally agreed. Working relationships should be confirmed between wetlands conservation agencies and existing high-level coordination mechanisms –High Council on Environmental Conservation, High Council on Water, National Committee for Sustainable Development, Commission on Agriculture and Natural Resources. **Figure 2** suggests a possible institutional framework. Once the new long-term institutional arrangements are confirmed, the role of the project and the PSC becomes clearer, to support the development and operations of the new wetlands management body(ies).
101. *Management Plans*: The MTE has some concerns that the project is relying too heavily on a relatively simple style of management plan as the sole mechanism for framing policy and operational management decisions. It notes that the lengthy process that has been followed – aimed at integrating the policies and practices of several resource sectors and management agencies; and nurturing participation of multiple stakeholders – has not yet resulted in any firm decisions being taken with respect to any of the difficult issues that are confronting the two pilot wetland areas. Many of the respondents questioned by the MTE did not seem to consider the LU and LP management plans signed in 2008 as their crucial multi-level policy decisions, for their agencies to execute, to regulate the management and

use of the two wetlands and basins. The impression given was that at present, the two management plans are considered to be products of the CIWP, which somehow the CIWP is going to use to conserve the two wetland sites; the management plans are not yet taken on board by the main permanent institutions that are to be responsible for wetlands and basin conservation. Part of the problem is that the CIWP has followed a conventional management planning model drawn from the Ramsar Convention, which may be suitable to govern management of a local wetland protected area, but which is not sufficiently robust to govern multiple-use integrated management regimes over entire catchments. The project is trying to use a Protected Area Management Plan to address local “WPA issues” (Outcome 1) and to manage the entire region around the local wetland site – the basin or catchment governed by one or more Provinces.¹⁴ This point is brought home most clearly in the case of the Lake Uromiyeh pilot area, comprising the largest lake in Iran, within a highly complex basin spanning 3 Provinces, and facing a range of intractable ecological issues.

102. The **MTE recommends (Rec 6.)** that the management planning mechanism being introduced by CIWP should be strengthened; for each pilot area, a more robust governance framework (local, Provincial and national) is needed for integrated management of the whole catchment, within which a series of more conventional Management Plans may be applied (to specific sites, sectors, species and/or issues). Management planning should be a clearly staged process, progressively developing a strategic policy framework and action program; it should be signed/ approved in stages, not as a “finished document”; and it should include clear precise policies and rigorous targets and indicators.
103. [A final note on management plans for the pilot areas is that draft plans are reported to have been substantially developed during the PDF’B’ phase of CIWP design: the Project Brief stresses that “Many of the site-specific activities in the present project are based on evaluations and recommendations made in these (management plan) documents. It will be important to reach national-level agreement early in the (CIWP) concerning the final form of the Lake Uromiyeh Management Plan, as well as the draft plan for Arjan Protected Area.” No mention was made to the MTE of these earlier management plans, but it would be useful to know what became of them. At the least, the process by which they were produced and the form each one reached should be evaluated, as part of the pilot and learning process that is at the centre of the CIWP. As was mentioned also in the Project Brief and confirmed to the MTE, management plans are in the process of being prepared by DoE for most of Iran’s wetlands and protected areas. These processes and the resulting plans should also be informed by the lessons learned through evaluation of the PDF phase management planning efforts and of the later pilots facilitated by the CIWP; this is a ready-made area for attention under Outcome 3.]
104. *Direct management of threats to wetland ecosystems:* The MTE is concerned that amid all the CIWP activity, there has been little direct action to address the array of critical threats to Iran’s wetlands. While these had been well documented during the project design process, and used to form the CIW project plan and logical framework, there is a danger that by the end of the project, it may have piloted new arrangements for DoE to operate its WPAs, but will not have tested nor introduced new ways to conserve wetlands by addressing the threats – of inefficient water use & over-allocation; wetland pollution from agricultural, urban and industrial development; land degradation and landscape devaluation; ineffective EIA procedures; and alien species invasions. Each of these has been raised in working groups, public awareness materials, consultants’ reports and planning workshops, and is flagged as an issue in the two pilot area management plans that have been compiled.

¹⁴ In this regard, the MTE notes that the proposed focus on “local WPA management structures” was questioned during the CIW project formulation, given that “most wetland sites are outside the WPA system, and most threats are external”. The project’s designers responded that they had “gone to great lengths to ensure that the project’s efforts are largely taking place outside of the PA boundaries: less than 29% of incremental funds are going to Outcome 1, compared with more than 46% in the broader basins (Outcome 2)” (Project Document).

Unfortunately, the idea of action to tackle any of the threats directly appears to have been lost in the process. A range of MTE respondents advised that they are still waiting for the “planning phase” to be completed, and then will move on to the “implementation phase”; clearly this is one of the main reasons why so little of the national budget has been mobilized. However, this approach ignores the considerable work that went into producing the project plan, which does not divide project implementation into two phases of (i) management planning, followed by (ii) management actions. The MTE considers that it is unnecessary and unwise for CIWP to wait on the participatory planning process to such an extent.

105. One factor that has contributed to the lack of attention to threats and over-reliance on the management planning process is that the project plan and logical framework have not been found useful in project implementation. In particular, project implementation has not followed the key planned Outputs (“sub-outcome”) laid out in the original logical framework; as noted under Project Design, the wording used did not focus attention on the substantive objective underlying each Output (refer to **table 5.2**). As stated in **MTE recommendation 1**, it will be useful to critically re-examine the project’s strategic (Output) objectives concerned with managing threats, and to consider carefully alternative strategies for achieving them. A more effective approach may be for the Working Groups to work rigorously on each of the priority threats that are faced by (the pilot) wetlands; take the lead in devising a strategy to tackle each issue; and subsequently pilot direct actions to implement the strategy and record and evaluate the results. These direct “Strategic Actions” can be linked to the Management Plans in due course.
106. *Capacity development*: It is clear from the summary list of achievements in **tables 13 and 14** that the project’s principal delivery strategy is to build the capacity of relevant stakeholders to work more effectively towards the conservation of wetlands. The project is structured in this way, to focus on capacity development at local site level (Outcome 1); ecosystem/ basin/ Province/ regional level (Outcome 2); and national level (Outcome 3). The project does appear to be doing a good job as a facilitator of change by capacity building, rather than playing too much of a direct role in the management of wetlands. However, given this major project focus, the **MTE recommends (Rec 7.1)** that the CIWP should take a more critical look at the effectiveness of all of its capacity development activities. It is easy but relatively meaningless to simply record the amount of activity – the numbers of studies, training exercises, participants, communication media, and so on; it is more difficult but far more important to ensure that each activity is effective in achieving the planned results, which are to do with changed behaviours; revised policies; improved practices, etc. that in turn are needed to address each of the substantive threats that are degrading Iran’s wetlands. The logical framework’s Output objectives and Indicators need further development so that they can be used as tools for monitoring and evaluating progress towards these fundamental objectives of capacity development, rather than merely recording the range of activity.
107. The majority of the project’s activities have targeted and benefited individuals who have been involved in the programs at the two pilot areas and in Tehran; clearly there has been a considerable amount of knowledge transfer to many officials in DoE and other line agencies, through their participation in working groups, studies and planning workshops; and, probably to a lesser extent, to members of NGOs and local community organizations. However, it appears that so far there has been relatively little action aimed at developing the functional capacities of organizational units, and even less addressing the capacity of the overall system. The **MTE recommends (Rec 7.2)** that this focus should shift markedly in the second half of the project, given the need to re-form the ways in which organizations work, both internally and with other organizations, in order to create a more effective system for governing and managing wetland ecosystems.
108. *Policy development*: It appears that at this stage, the CIWP has not had an influence on public policy development other than through management planning, which as noted

above is a continuing process. In common with many assistance projects, CIWP does not work closely with policy makers but has focused on improving operational arrangements. The project's role in policy development is treated rather simplistically in the Project Document. There is clearly a significant issue for the PCO and PSC to consider carefully: how can a well-resourced project like CIWP contribute most effectively to the government's policy agenda; how can policy-makers and regulators most readily draw on the CIW project's resources for assistance in one form or another; how can the project's policy objectives be aligned closely with the government's? These are important questions for CIWP: its major Outcome 3 is aimed directly at reforming and developing government policy with respect to wetlands, biodiversity conservation, protected areas, management of natural resources and environmental issues, multi-sectoral integration and public participation in conservation planning and management.

109. As noted under Project Management & Implementation Arrangements, the 5-Year National Development Plans are important vehicles for the development and implementation of public policy in Iran, across all sectors. The implementation of the CIW Project, from 2005 to date, has coincided with the period of the 4th NDP (2004 to 2009), which provided *inter alia*, for the introduction of ecosystem-based approaches to the management of environmental and natural resources issues. The MTE was advised that apart from the CIWP, little has been done during the period of the 4th NDP to meet this policy objective; a high-level committee was convened and received a briefing from the CIWP, but subsequently has not been active. At the time of the MTE, the 5th National Development Plan was being compiled by departmental working groups. It will outline the government's agenda for 2010 to 2014, during which period the CIWP will reach completion. The 5th NDP is thus a critical and timely opportunity for the project to introduce its policy objectives into the government's main strategic planning document; in particular, there is an opportunity for the 5th NDP to include explicit reference to the CIWP strategy (not yet defined) for rolling out nationally the improved system for governing and managing wetland ecosystems and their conservation.
110. The **MTE recommends (Rec 8.)** that in order to work effectively and efficiently towards Outcome 3, the PCO and PSC should plan a clear strategy for strengthening the government's policy framework with respect to wetlands conservation and governing a national system, to be implemented over the remaining 3-4 years of the project, starting with an immediate effort to insert CIWP objectives into the 5th NDP.
111. *Replication strategy and development of a national wetlands conservation system.* When the new institutional arrangements and policy options have been tested, and effective conservation (threat management) of the two pilot areas is being demonstrated, the CIWP is to use the lessons that emerge from the pilot work to facilitate development of a strengthened national system of wetland conservation. The idea is to replicate the improved model in a systematic way across the country. The original plan for a national replication strategy was to develop "5-10 in-depth replication sites" from the other 34 WPA that were listed. In 2008, the project started work on one major replication site, selecting the extensive area of the Shadegan marshes in Khuzestan Province at the head of the Persian Gulf, and assisting local authorities to form working groups and proceed rapidly through a participatory management planning process.
112. As noted in several places above, the specifications for the new style of wetland conservation and water basin management being promoted by the CIWP are not yet clear. **Table 15** summarizes a number of outstanding questions noted by the MTE. The MTE is concerned that by this mid-stage, year 4/5 of the project, the CIWP should be providing explicit and clear answers to these questions. The answers need to be found in the pilot area programs that the CIWP is facilitating. That is the objective behind planned Output 3.4: to draw lessons from all of the pilot work and apply them to the new type of conservation system that is envisaged.

Table 15: Specifications for the new style of wetland conservation and basin management promoted by CIWP – Outstanding questions

1. Is the project facilitating a new type of wetland conservation area, or merely strengthening DoE's current WPA?
2. How will a local wetland site be managed as an integral part of the whole ecosystem or basin/ catchment?
3. What threat management strategies are being piloted and demonstrated by CIWP?
4. How will competing and conflicting demands over using wetland/ water/ land resources be resolved; and governed within conservative sustainable limits?
5. What will the institutional arrangements be for the new system, at district, Provincial and national levels?
6. What will DoE's role be in governing the new multiple agency program?
7. How will the functions of multiple agencies be integrated to meet higher objectives, not just coordinated among separate agencies?
8. What changes to laws will be required?
9. What will be the financing mechanism for the multi-user regime?
10. What priority rights to use wetland resources will local communities be given in exchange for their collaboration in conserving the wetlands?

113. The **MTE recommends (Rec 9.)** that the pilot area actions must be completed and evaluated, and the new model system for wetland conservation should be documented and confirmed, before starting any replication sites or extending into a national system. Shadegan should be developed as a third CIWP pilot area, and the 3 pilot areas should be completed to the point where all operations are being handled by the permanent institutions. Generally, there is a need to consolidate what has been learned so far. This will require a more rigorous approach to evaluation of the project's experimental/ pilot work: every aspect of the pilot programs – refer to each of the questions raised above – should be tested systematically, evaluated against other options, and documented. This should be done for each level of the model system: i.e. 1. integrated management of the local wetland sites; 2. Provincial and District governance mechanisms for integrated (wetland) ecosystem management; and 3. management of a national system and program for strengthened wetland conservation across the country.
114. The **MTE recommends (Rec 10.)** that the project should modify its strategy for developing the strengthened national system of wetland conservation. In the remaining few years of the CIWP, it is essential to consolidate the results of the first phase and demonstrate the effectiveness of the new model, 3-level system of wetlands conservation at the 3 pilot areas. The second phase, which should start immediately after the MTE, in parallel with the demonstrations being developed, should give strong support to the country-wide roll-out of the new model. Thus, rather than CIWP taking responsibility for developing a further set of "in-depth replication sites", the recommended strategy is for CIWP to facilitate development of the permanent organizations that will form the new system, and enable them to take responsibility for developing the replication sites. This can be done Province by Province, basin by basin, or by strengthening management of the wetlands sites in priority order, perhaps of biodiversity significance or severity of threats.
115. The recommended timing for these phases and completing the project are summarized in **table 16**. This illustrates the important point that the program of wetlands conservation strengthening work, which was initiated, facilitated and supported by the CIW project, continues beyond the project – both in time, with the further capacity development of the new, permanent organizations; and geographically, with the continued extension of the new model to additional Provinces and additional basins and wetland areas. Thus, the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands initiative will be sustained after the end of the CIW Project itself.

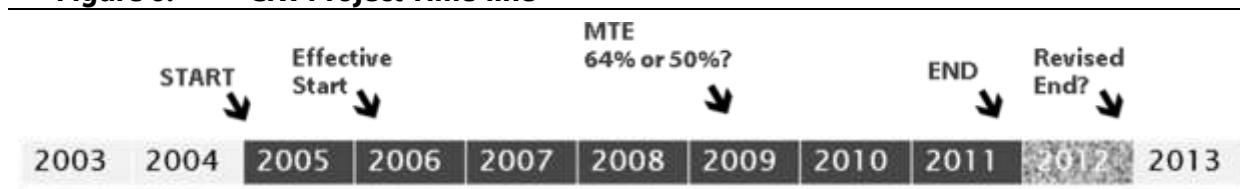
Table 16: Suggested timing of replication strategy and CIWP completion

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Consolidation of pilot work in 3 areas – Uromiyeh, Parishan, Shadegan	⇒	⇒			
Capacity development of new system organizations	⇒	⇒	⇒	⇒	⇒
Development of replication wetland areas		⇒	⇒	⇒	⇒
Completion of CIWP					▶

Project duration and extension

116. Following the lengthy design phase, the CIWP was approved in late 2004. The plan was for a 7-year project, with a start date in January 2005 and a completion date in December 2011. Refer to **figure 6**. An inception phase took up the whole of 2005, giving an effective start date in the first quarter (Q1) of 2006. The Mid-Term Evaluation was carried out in May-June 2009, 64% along the timeline from January 2005; 50% of the time from Q1.2006.

Figure 6: CIW Project Time-line



117. As noted in the MTE report, progress each year has been slower than planned, and the project has not yet completed half of its work program, particularly with regard to Outcomes 2 and 3. Mobilization of the planned budget has been particularly slow, with only 22% spent by the end of Q1.2009. The **MTE recommends (Rec 11.)** re-planning the second half of the project, with particular attention to the time, budget and PCO human resources that will be required to achieve the substantive results and confirmed targets for strengthening conservation of the pilot areas (3, including Shadegan) and extending the lessons through an appropriate replication strategy to a national system. The point at which the CIW project will end must also be confirmed: this should be set as the point when each of the components of the new Iranian system for wetlands conservation (institutions, regulations, policies, finances, operations) is up and running.

118. Following the MTE, the PCO and PSC should determine the indicators that will denote when the required end-of-project situation has been reached. The slow start and lack of real progress in 2005 and 2006 provide reasonable justification for an extension of the project by one or two years. Any extension should be planned by project management and the PSC, and approved by the TPR, in time to inform the annual planning and budgeting process for 2010 and subsequent years.