



Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project - Phase II (Scale-up)

The State of Iran's Environment

Iran is currently experiencing major environmental challenges. Some of the evident signs of environmental degradation over the decades are increasing water shortage; drying rivers, wetlands and aquifers; air and waste pollution; soil erosion, deforestation, desertification, sand and dust storms; land subsidence and sinkholes; wildfires and biodiversity losses.

Water bankruptcy is the most recognized problem, with rapid growth of the population and its improper spatial distribution, economically inefficient and environmentally unsustainable agricultural growth and mismanagement of water as its major drivers, worsened in turn by climatic variability and change.

Agriculture withdraws more than 90 percent of Iran's water.

Background

Wetlands are among the world's most precious ecosystems. They play a pivotal role in the local economy and stability and are home to diverse plants and animals of significance to humanity. However, due to changes in global climate and local issues, wetlands everywhere are under threat.

Recognizing the significance of this ecosystem, the Government of Islamic Republic of Iran (led by the Department of Environment (DoE)), Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and UNDP successfully executed the Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project (CIWP). After completion of the project in 2013, a scale-up phase was started by DoE and UNDP to sustain the achievements of the CIWP and ensure that outcomes are systematically expanded country-wide.



The project has supported introduction of integrated and participatory ecosystem-based approaches for conservation of around 34 wetlands in Iran, while raising the capacity of experts in the DoE and other stakeholder organizations. This happens through development and implementation of Wetlands Integrated Management Plans, putting in place a strong wetlands ecosystem management legislative platform and inter-sectoral administrative structures, development of Communication, Education, Participation and Awareness Raising (CEPA) Plans and sharing the CIWP and other wetlands initiatives, knowledge and lessons learnt at the national and international levels.

The stakeholders have recognised that policy initiatives have to be bolstered by the participation and cooperation of the local people, including women, if ultimate goals are to be met. To this end, the initiatives involve a compendium of new policy perspectives, awareness drives, up-skilling, alternative livelihood options and monetisation routes.

In 2014, with financial contribution from the Government of Japan, a new component for “Modelling Local Community Participation in Lake Urmia Restoration” was added under the current project with a strong focus on capacity-building and training as the main tools of development projects with a participatory approach. The project is now in its 7th phase and covers 183 villages (116 in West and 67 in East Azerbaijan), with various small projects and activities in different areas. These projects include alternative and sustainable livelihood, micro-credit funds, and Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES).

The CIWP is currently based on the 2020-2025 project document. In addition, a 3-year cooperation was initiated between DoE Iran and the Government of Japan to up-scale successful practices tested in the Lake Urmia basin to additional pilots in Lake Urmia (and satellite wetlands) and 2 new replication sites - Shadegan Wetland (Khuzestan Province), and Bakhtegan Wetland (Fars Province).

Key Achievements to Date

- Successful introduction of participatory ecosystem-based approach to the conservation of Iran’s wetlands in over 20 provinces and 34 wetlands.
- Sharing CIWP achievements and best practices as well as complementary tools

through the setting up of online platforms:

- * Water ecosystem monitoring stations <https://WOMS.DOE.IR>
- * Vulnerability assessment analysis for 24 Ramsar sites <https://vaowir.ir/en>

- Strengthening national wetlands management laws and regulations through a Parliament Act, a National Wetland Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (NWCSAP) and setting up a National Wetlands Coordination and Management Headquarters.
- Modelling local communities' participation in the restoration of Lake Urmia, introducing sustainable agriculture and biodiversity conservation practices in 183 pilot villages (116 in West and 67 in East Azerbaijan), resulting in approximately 30% irrigation water saving and 55% efficiency at the farm level (Phase 1-5)
 - * Number of farmers involved: 13,500
 - * Trained farmers (Resource persons): 4,500
 - * Trained local experts (Resource persons): 300
 - * Employment: 200 local experts
 - * Number of local implementing partners (Companies and cooperatives): 34
- Engagement and empowerment of local women
 - * Number of NGOs involved: 12
 - * Number of rural women trained for Lake Urmia restoration measures: 800
 - * Micro-credit funds / alternative livelihood options by women's groups: 21 villages
 - * Number of rural women involved in green jobs: Over 700
- Awareness-raising and social responsibility improvement through capacity-building and training workshops, festivals, exhibitions and street theatre, and preparation and dissemination of publications, guidelines, videos and television broadcasts for different target groups