

NORTH AFRICA PROGRAMME PHASE 1

January 1996 – April 1998

Final Summary Report

Introduction

North Africa extends along the southern shore of the Mediterranean, consisting of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. It extends over 545.3 million hectares and has a population of 150 million. 98.3% of the area are drylands vulnerable to desertification and the hazards of drought.

North Africa has important resources of biological diversity. It is the home of plant species that are relatives of livestock and food and fodder crops, and of hundreds of species that are traditional medicinal plants. It is the geographic transition between the warm tropics in the South and the temperate zone in the North, and so forms an important part of the routes for migratory birds. It is also a region of rich cultural and natural heritage, which influences the daily lives of the people, as well as one of the historic sources of civilization.

North Africa's natural resources are especially vulnerable, in particular because:

- life is distributed very unevenly over the region, with large areas of uninhabited desert
- in the Northern fringe, where most of the people live, desertification is a constant threat
- land, sea and inland waters are being polluted by dangerous and hazardous chemicals
- the population is growing rapidly
- much land is being converted to agricultural use, and much existing agricultural land suffers from salinization
- the growth of industry and of human settlements and the development of tourism is putting pressure on natural resources
- most biotic and abiotic resources are not effectively managed, and
- there is a need for greater institutional development to tackle environment and sustainable development issues.

Against this background IUCN, with the support of Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), initiated an arid land biodiversity programme for North Africa in 1996.

Summary of Phase 1

Goals and Objectives

The overall goal of the programme was to improve conservation and sustainable use of North Africa's biodiversity.

The objectives were:

- To review the main threats to biodiversity through gap analysis;
- To document and report on the main threats to biodiversity in North Africa;
- To identify the key centres of biological diversity and endemism in North Africa;
- To analyze the status of medicinal plants in North Africa and valorize their potential in terms of economic benefits;
- To identify the most endangered species and to identify methods for their conservation;
- To train personnel on the special skills required for the management of protected areas, with emphasis on local community participation and sharing of benefits;

- To develop means of regional coordination and cooperation for conserving biodiversity and for selecting and managing protected areas in North Africa.

Activities

During Phase 1, the North Africa Programme concentrated on 4 projects:

- Conservation of Centres of Biodiversity
- Conservation and Sustainable Use of Medicinal Plants
- Conservation of Cheetah, and
- Biodiversity Education and Communication.

The main focus of the project activities consisted in gathering information, analyzing data, identifying gaps, and carrying out preliminary field studies, resulting in the preparation of national and regional reports, databases, management plans, guidelines, strategies and action plans.

In addition, it provided for the translation of “A Guide to the Convention on Biological Diversity” (IUCN, 1994) into Arabic. The programme also initiated a project on Women and Biodiversity in North Africa.

Partners

The partners of IUCN in this project were first and foremost IUCN members - both governmental and non-governmental - in the region. More specifically, in each country a Focal Point (member of an IUCN organization and representing the organization) was nominated to coordinate and manage the activities carried out under the project. Each Focal Point then worked with a number of conservation actors in the country, IUCN members, both Governments and NGOs, partners, experts, Universities to implement the project.

Regional Coordination

One of the main objectives and outputs of the Programme was the fostering of regional coordination between the 5 North African countries.

Results and Outputs

The main results and outputs of Phase 1 were:

- Establishment of an arid land biodiversity conservation programme across the region that:
 - was decentralized;
 - was building capacity;
 - was designed by experts in the region to serve the needs of the region;
 - stimulated substantial in-kind support from local and national bodies;
 - mobilized national efforts involving government institutes and departments, NGOs and individual experts.
- Increased links on biodiversity conservation issues between the countries;
- Solid conservation achievements, especially in:
 - identifying and documenting centres of biodiversity;
 - identifying threatened medicinal plants and developing teams and alliances for medicinal plant conservation;
 - re-finding the cheetah in North Africa and identifying which areas would be the optimal reserves for it;
 - preparing a series of fact-sheets on biodiversity education for use in schools, in Arabic, French and English;
 - translating a key conservation text into Arabic;
 - training of experts.
 - Defining a programme, structure and activities for the Women and Biodiversity project, and carrying out initial activities.

Problems encountered and objectives which were not met

A number of problems were encountered during Phase 1, some of which had impacts on the expected results and outputs of the Programme:

- Regional Coordination as defined in the project proved difficult to set in place.
- Coordination and management structures were seen as too complex.
- Capacity building was often understood to be the strengthening of organizations in terms of equipment, etc. not the development of networks, institutions, experts, etc.
- Less people/organisations were involved in the project in each country than was anticipated.
- Use of local/national/regional expertise was insufficient.
- Technical backstopping from IUCN was insufficient in some of the sub-projects.
- The Financial system and reporting was considered too complicated and was not always clearly understood.
- Links between projects at country level and at regional level were not sufficient.
- Lack of a common language between the different countries in the region and IUCN (French, English, Arabic).
- Outputs were not always provided on time or provided in adequate form.

Phase 2 of the North Africa Programme (May 1998 – April 2000) will seek to improve and overcome, as far as possible, these issues.

Audit

There are no particular remarks in the audit report.