

North Africa Biodiversity Programme – Phase II Project Overview / Summary

During Phase II of the Project, emphasis was put on community participation. Natural resource conservation activities were implemented with a rural community.

The participating organisations confronted the difficulties of developing practical responses to conservation challenges in poor rural settings. Sensitisation, assistance, and technology and knowledge exchange actions were undertaken along with small-scale technical studies relative to medicinal and other economically useful plants, cheetah distribution and conservation, ecotourism, and traditional knowledge.

The medicinal plants theme emerged as the one that most participating organisations could contribute to. Public information and educational materials were planned and produced in most countries. The Women & Biodiversity theme provoked the constitution of a small network of women's organisations who produced four newsletters. The field activities of the women's organisations were limited although some were initiated in Algeria, Morocco and Egypt.

Phase II – Objectives:

The goal for Phase II was the Conservation and sustainable development of arid land biodiversity in North Africa

Two objectives were fixed:

1. Carry out concrete activities related to Conservation of Biodiversity, Sustainable Development, Participation at local communities, Capacity Building at all levels, Public Awareness, Role of women in Biodiversity Conservation and Regional coordination issues at specific sites of importance to biodiversity in each national programme;
2. Enhance regional coordination between the five countries by undertaking specific national activities in Conservation and Sustainable use of Medicinal Plants, Conservation of Centres of Biodiversity, Conservation of Cheetah, Biodiversity Education and Communication and Women and Biodiversity thematic areas:

Activities, Outputs and Lessons learned:

1. Regional Level:

Although regional activities did not evolve as expected in the second phase, regular exchanges between the participating organisations (and IUCN) allowed for an ongoing discussion of experiences. Five coordination meetings were held during the second phase, and included a day visit to a field site, which allowed for informal feed back and sharing of experience on the actions underway in the programme.

Following an internal evaluation in May 2000, the continuation of the programme was carried with more orientation while focusing on one theme: Medicinal Plants. The participating organisations worked together at the regional level to combine their experiences and create a regional network to gather, publish and disseminate information on medicinal and other economically useful plants. Women's issues were integrated into activities at the country and regional level with a focus on gender training within field activities and the emphasis on community participation was maintained.

Publication of four issues of a newsletter of the women's network, with a limited distribution. The subjects covered were: water; medicinal plants, interaction between women & biodiversity; and finally women & biodiversity in mountain ecosystems.

Regional activities did not evolve as expected due to communication problems, both in logistical and linguistic terms, and the lack of a clear focus for regional collaboration.

2. National Level:

In the second phase, each organisation undertook to work with local communities to use the knowledge accumulated to end of Phase I to assist people in using natural resources in a sustainable way. Participatory approaches were increasingly adopted. A number of micro-activities were developed in conjunction with local communities, ranging from the creation of plant nurseries in Egypt, to the commercialisation of medicinal plants in Tunisia. Participatory processes were the basis for conducting surveys, granting micro-credits, offering training opportunities and awareness raising events, and subsidizing certain investments.

Progress achieved in the 5 participating countries

In each country 2 sub-projects were implemented. Of these, one project in each country was a "women's project". The leaders of the "women's projects" together constituted the core of a women's network, and contributed to the production of 4 issues of a network newsletter.

Algeria

- Update the database on Cheetah distribution in North Africa. Awareness raising of the population of dangers for the Cheetah of the use of poison.
- Prepared guide to Algeria medicinal plants, improved collection of plant specimens, prepared regulation and began testing the intensive multiplication of medicinal plants. Two committees, the first at the local level and the second at the national level have been initiated to monitor progress.
- Prepared bibliography of biodiversity references, prepared educational materials for use with local communities.

Women & Biodiversity:

- In Algeria, the *Mouvement Ecologique Algérien* initiated participatory discussions with the rural community in the commune of Oulad Taga. With an emphasis on the needs of women, micro-activities such as the introduction of improved stoves were carried out.

Egypt

- A book on the Wild Medicinal Plants in Egypt was published, as was a booklet about Biodiversity in Arabic.
- Traditional land-use and conservation of endangered species
- Discussed medicinal plants conservation and propagation with different stakeholders.
- Trans-boundary transfer of medicinal plants from Libya to Egypt, and possibly in the other direction as well.
- Indigenous knowledge has been found to occur among the Bedouin. Indigenous knowledge and traditional methods of the use of the components of biodiversity may be useful in solving the problem of biodiversity deterioration.
- A "*Centre and Garden for the Conservation of Endangered Plants*" has been established. The Centre will be used to test the cultivation of important wild or endangered medicinal plants, and as a scientific visiting center for awareness, education and research.
- Priority is given to plant species important for the Bedouin communities.

Women & Biodiversity:

- In Egypt, the Tree Lovers Association has been engaged in the mobilisation of public opinion in favour of the protection of the Wadi Degla area.

Libya

Communications problems made coordination and financial flows complicated. Libya has shared with the group its experience in information management and data base establishment, and in public awareness actions.

Women & Biodiversity:

- In Libya, the Women's Coordinator changed three times and activities never really got underway. Contributions to the women's newsletter were made however.

Morocco

- In situ conservation of endangered medicinal plants and endangered animals
- Introduction and development of production, storage, transformation and commercialisation of natural products
- Fuel efficient stoves were introduced and awareness raising conducted
- Conservation of natural habitats and reintroduction of native species
- Eco-tourism development
- Public awareness, education and training of local populations

Women & Biodiversity:

- In Morocco, the *Association Marocaine de Protection de l'Environnement* initiated participatory discussions with the rural community in the village of Tororte within the Toukbal national Park. With an emphasis on the needs of women micro-actions such as the distribution of improved stoves, training in weaving skills, honey making, and literacy were carried out.

Tunisia

- Main medicinal plants were identified, and discussions with communities led to identification of economically useful plants for attention
- 45 families are in process of receiving support for the development of family plots, protected from depredations cause by the numerous wild boars from the adjacent National park.
- Popularization of new techniques for the treatment, storage and commercialisation of medicinal plants
- Drying and distillation technology has been introduced along with the concepts of post-harvest processing and marketing.
- Public awareness with regard to medicinal plants

Women & Biodiversity:

- In Tunisia, the Women's Coordinator (*Union Nationale des Femmes Tunisiennes/Association des Femmes et environnement*) changed twice and activities never really got underway. Contributions to the women's newsletter were made however.

Constraints:

The diversity within the IUCN membership in North Africa and the need to organise work in both English and French, combined to make a start difficult. The complex structure of the programme (central management from Gland, with 10 individual projects each the subject of sub-contracts, project descriptions, budgets, etc.) the weak organisational capabilities of IUCN in the region, and difficulties in communications combined to produce confusion over the exact status of project activities, and delays in transferring funds to partner organisations. In spite of this, a number of activities were carried out as administrative solutions were found.