

# **IUCN - The World Conservation Union North Africa Biodiversity Program – Phase III**

## **Progress Report January –December 2003**

### **1. Introduction**

Since 1996, with the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), IUCN is coordinating the implementation of an arid land biodiversity program in North Africa, hereinafter referred to as North Africa Biodiversity Program (NABP). The program aims at promoting and improving the conservation and sustainable use of North Africa's biological diversity, and facilitating the networking of institutions from the region to support this objective. IUCN members from government and non-governmental organizations from Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia constitute this network, and are, for most part, implementing the program. The program is currently in phase-III which would end in 2003. This three year phase was to begin in June 2001 but the preparations took longer for the project to actually commence in November that year. Therefore, SDC and IUCN are considering an extension in the project period.

What follows is a report of the progress in the project implementation in 2003. The report also presents a prognosis of the program in the future.

### **2. Aims and Objectives**

The program aims at the conservation of biodiversity in North Africa. To this end, it also seeks to promote a network of institutions from the region, and the role of women in biodiversity conservation.

Phase III of the Programme has two main objectives:

- promote the conservation of endangered and economically useful plants in North Africa with special reference to medicinal and aromatic plants; and,
- promote indigenous knowledge and an equitable participation of people in the management and conservation of endangered and economically useful plants.

To achieve these objectives, activities and outputs are focussed at two levels: regional and national.

### **3. Highlights of Activities (January-September 2003)**

The reporting period was characterised by a relatively slow pace of activities resulting in part from a holdback on major new activities pending the internal review of the program carried out in April-May. Partly, the 'hold back' was misinterpreted by some parts of the program, particularly in Tunisia and Morocco, as to mean a ban on all activities. Nonetheless, the program did continue to move forward significantly.

#### **3.1 Regional Activities**

The work on developing the compendium of medicinal plants of North Africa significantly progressed further. Scientists from the five participating countries developed the first set of monographs of at least 10 medicinal plants from each country. The Committee of Experts including eminent researchers and experts in participatory approaches and gender issues from the region met on June 20-23, 2003 in Tunisia to review the monographs and development of the compendium. The main out puts of the meeting were a

clearly established list of plants for monographs from different countries and a modular 'standard monograph' that would avoid duplication and ensure consistency in the development of the compendium with inputs from the various countries. An important aspect of the meeting was participation of the two representatives of the Species Survival Commission of IUCN that would further contribute to the quality and rigour of the compendium work.

The work on development of the website and data base also progressed albeit slowly. A first design of these outputs was presented to the Experts Committee meeting whose recommendations will be taken into account in taking this work forward.

The training workshop on Participatory Approaches and Gender organised last year was followed. The participants used the learning from the workshop in further strengthening such work in the respective countries. Moreover, a regional women's network was established and a first draft of "Women and Biodiversity" bulletin was also produced.

Moreover, the Regional Coordination Unit facilitated the internal review of the program with the Coordinator participating in the review mission in various countries. It continued liaison with the Tunisian Government, Ministry of Environment seeking their support for the program sustainability. It also continued interaction with the other key national and regional institutions such as WWF, PAOTIC, FEM/PNUD, RAC/SPA for sharing experiences and enhancing collaboration and synergy.

### **3.2. National activities**

#### **3.2.1 Algeria**

The work continued on establishing and expanding the seed-bank and a corresponding nursery of medicinal and aromatic plants at the Government research centre at Batna. 15 more species were added to the collection during the year raising the total number of species to 35.

The program maintained the demonstrations of cultivation of medicinal plants at three locations around Batna. At one location it supported the creation of a 1000 litre water collection facility used by the participating household for its domestic needs as well as for the irrigation of plants on the demonstration plot. For a major part, these demonstrations are run by women members of the households and are likely to contribute to their increased income and empowerment. Another important feature of these demonstrations is the collaboration with the Department of Agriculture which complements the project's support by providing additional inputs in terms of irrigation infrastructure and extension services. This in turn also increases the prospects for longer term sustainability of the program.

Besides continuing the usual documentation and publication of its work as before, the programme produced monographs of 9 medicinal plants as its contribution to the regional compendium of medicinal plants. It also produced a documentary film "Women and Biodiversity – Medicinal Plants" around the project work at the 3 demonstration sites.

#### **3.2.2 Egypt**

The activities continued to be centred in the El Omayed Protectorate in North Western Egypt, along the Mediterranean coast at El Alamein, near Alexandria. These activities can be categorised into three: (a) field nurseries established with the involvement of the local Bedouin population, (b) construction of a Medicinal Plant Centre (MPC) at El-Alamein, and (c) establishment of a medicinal plant garden at the Centre.

Main activities in the field nurseries have included the continued collection of seeds, propagules and transplants, and their stocking in the nurseries. These are local nurseries, rather modest in their size and management but their significance lies in that these are established together with the local population leading to their greater awareness and recognition of the value of medicinal plants as well as in establishing the feasibility of artificially raising such plants in the desert conditions.

The construction of the MPC has been nearly completed, and work has been initiated on securing utility services for the building as well as its furnishing. The centre is expected to be ready by the year end or early 2004 to serve the needs for education, training and research in medicinal plants in future. As a part of the centre, during this year, the project also established a specialized herbarium for rare and endangered species of medicinal plants.

Attached to the centre is the medicinal plants garden that provides the venue for cultivation of medicinal plants and holding the collection of wild plants from the desert and various field nurseries. In addition to maintaining those cultivated in previous period, several new species were tried including a successful trial for the cultivating of Tamarix species from cuttings of wild trees in the region.

Work was also commenced on gathering indigenous knowledge of medicinal and other useful plants. This is being achieved through literature review and gathering first hand information from the Bedouin population. The Gender Group constituted under the program, largely drawn from research and academia, will be helping in completing this work through household interviews in the field. The involvement of the Gender Group is aimed at ensuring maximum attention to the gender aspects of the indigenous knowledge.

### **3.2.3 Libya**

The programme in Libya continued the collection of data about ecologically and economically useful medicinal (and aromatic) plant species. The information was compiled in reports and shared with partners. The list of these reports is being regularly updated and being used by decision makers. In the reporting period, information gathering particularly focussed on indigenous knowledge collected from local people and literature.

The program continued the collection of seeds, raising of nurseries and trials of replanting the endangered medicinal plants in the field. These trials now need to be assessed if they do indeed provide a basis for in-situ conservation of medicinal plants at large scale.

The program further investigated the commercialization and trade aspects of the medicinal plants cultivation. These investigations would help establish a system of incentives and regulation to support the conservation of medicinal plants in the wild. In the process, the program has learnt that the market for medicinal plants transcends national boundaries and that it would be important to understand the trade in medicinal plants from a regional perspective.

Gender remained a key focus of the programme and a multidisciplinary gender group was set up and is actively engaged. Also, the establishment of a database for biodiversity resources and their conservation in the wild was initiated during the reporting period.

### **3.2.4 Morocco**

The Morocco project site is at the Park National of Toubkal. With the inclusion of the Park in the Morocco's Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP) the programme gained added significance. While Morocco's was one of the better managed parts of the program in the past, in 2003, there was not much progress in the program there. This is attributed for a major part to the 'holding back' on major new activities pending the internal review decided at the end of last year which was perceived to mean a ban on all activities.

### **3.3.5 Tunisia**

In Tunisia too, the program implementation did not progress further during the period. The reasons affecting the overall program as mentioned in the internal review report may have been the contributing factors besides the misunderstanding about the hold back on major new activities as in case of Morocco.

In addition, the change of site of field activities during the current phase also apparently affected the commencement of activities under the current phase in Tunisia.

#### **4. Overall Achievements and Challenges**

The 2003 was essentially a year of transition for the overall WESCANA Program of IUCN which is responsible for implementing the North Africa Biodiversity Program. The long time Director of the WESCANA Program retired and a process was undertaken to appoint his replacement. Meanwhile, an interim management was put in place to see through the transition, and importantly to move the Regional Office for WESCANA from its current location in IUCN HQ at Gland to a country in the region. Significant progress was made on both counts, and it is anticipated that the WESCANA regional Office with its new Director will be up and running from one of the countries of the Region by mid 2004.

This occasion of transition was also taken up for addressing some of the challenges and opportunities facing the NABP as listed in the last year's report. These *interalia* included: (i) a delayed start-up of Phase III; (ii) lack of necessary human capacities; (iii) lack of clarity in the roles of national programme coordinators vis-à-vis the newly created office for Regional Coordination in Tunis; (iv) the need for a similar clarity between the Regional Coordination Office and IUCN HQ and, (v) the need for a greater technical support for the field activities both from IUCN and other sources. A two pronged strategy was followed.

First and most important was the internal review that IUCN organized through an independent consultant in April-May 2003. The review concluded that the program had a lot of achievements to its credit, at times, more than is often known, and that the current Phase-III could be carried forward to completion as designed with some changes in the program management and implementation. Beside highlighting several areas of potential improvement, the report also indicated that even if successfully implemented, the full potential of the program for contributing to the overall goal of biodiversity conservation in the region may not be possible to realize due to some critical gaps in what is contemplated in terms of objectives and activities for Phase-III. The review recommended to close some relatively non-performing parts of the program and to focus efforts on those more successful. It also highlighted the prospects for an overall reorientation of the program in the future.

Second, field visits during the review mission as well as other opportunities of interaction with the implementation partners were used to bring the much needed clarity in mutual roles and responsibilities. This was a challenging task but a good progress was made during the year which would help a more effective program implementation in the future.

At the end of September 2003, a two day meeting of the project partners was held in Algeria to review the progress thus far, and to consider the internal review report as to the way forward. The meeting concluded that:

- The project (Phase III), as at present, would conclude as of 31 December 2003. Algeria, Libya and Egypt would have time to complete the pending activities until 31 May 2004 when IUCN current contract with SDC runs out.
- IUCN was requested for a further extension but it was explained that, a blanket extension under a status quo was unlikely. However, with changes, the donor may be willing to consider an extension. IUCN could ask the donor but could not promise further extension.
- The regional coordination function will cease to exist in its current form on 31 December 2003. IUCN will need to consider how pending regional activities, such as the compendium work, could be completed, and how the office premises given to it gratis by the Government of Tunisia could be managed.
- IUCN will endeavor to seek continuity and future follow-up of the successful elements of the program and to introduce new ones, either in the proposed follow-up program, or by seeking re-profiling of the funds remaining in the current program, or by exploring new donor sources.

The meeting ended with the expression of a strong sense of accomplishment by the participating organizations. They generously appreciated IUCN and SDC for the opportunity and support for their working together for several years. The participants also expressed a strong hope and desire that the prospects of a follow-up program will materialize, and that North Africa would continue to benefit from the support of IUCN and SDC.

It was a successful meeting in that it provided the opportunity for implementing some critical recommendations of the internal review, and opened the prospects for re-thinking of SDC-IUCN collaboration in North Africa.

Notable among the program achievements has been its ability to bring together institutions and scientists from across the region enabling them to network and to share knowledge and experiences of biodiversity conservation. This is what the participating institutions seem to have valued most. The development of the medicinal plants compendium is another substantive piece of work that significantly progressed during the year. Moreover, in several places the program has provided a highly prized value addition. For example, at Batna (Algeria), the modest project resources are providing a critical input in keeping operational a government research centre that hosts the program activities. In return, the program benefits from the elaborate infrastructure of building and staff of the centre which otherwise remains inadequately resourced with activity funds. Likewise, in Libya, the mere association of the program is providing a very strong incentive and motivation for the government investment in the program. 'We value your partnership and affiliation more than your funds' is a remark often made by the government partners. It has not been quantified but the government is believed to invest much more in the program related activities than the funds it receives from the program.

Perhaps the most important achievement of the program is the strengthening of its partner institutions from the Government and civil society. This is exemplified by the growth in size and influence of Mouvement Ecologique Algérien (MEA), Association Tunisienne pour la protection de la nature et de l'environnement (ATPNE), and Société pour la protection de la nature et des animaux (SPANNA) in Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco respectively as well as by the mutual support of the program and the partner government institutions in Algeria, Egypt and Libya. This provides a strong basis for continuing and multiplying work of the program in future. In a way this is the institutional development and sustainability on which the program was premised.

Alongside these important achievements, internal review and implementation experience have highlighted several issues that the project must deal with. These include, among others, a lack of understanding and cooperation between the Regional Coordination Unit and other parts of the program, notably the program in Tunisia, the work on best practice guidelines of community participation and gender integration that remains to be completed, the missing or weak links of the current activities to in-situ conservation and livelihoods, the potential (negative) effects of cultivation of medicinal plants if it would be displacing other agricultural uses of the land, the need for a greater understanding of the regional aspects of the program (such as trade and related policies), the need for greater government involvement, and a more meaningful integration of the gender perspective in the program.

Some of these issues have already been addressed through reorganization of the program following the meeting in Algeria as indicated in the meeting's conclusions mentioned above. Others would be addressed in part through the work plan for the next year and in part through the new follow-up program that IUCN and SDC contemplate to undertake in North Africa.

## **5. Prognosis**

The process of reorientation of the program undertaken in 2003 will be continued in 2004. This will be pursued in two ways. First, the work under Phase-III of the existing program will be continued, focusing on the relatively successful and promising parts of the program while phasing out the others. In doing so the critical gaps, conceptual and management, highlighted in the internal review will be filled as best as possible. This would mean, for example, carrying out studies on the legal and informal trade of medicinal and aromatic plants across the borders in the region and internationally, studies on the economics of

medicinal and aromatic plants especially in relationship to the incidence of poverty and livelihoods, and some base line studies as to the extent and value of the medicinal plants in the select protected areas of the participating countries. These studies will be undertaken alongside the activities in hand which will be completed. Together this will lay a strong foundation for the biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation work in the future.

Second, a new program for IUCN-SDC collaboration in North Africa will be designed that will build on the successes of the existing program but will be more strategic both in its contents and their implementation. While the eventual design of the program may be determined by a program preparation mission, the current appreciation of the context point towards a program that would focus on: (i) in-situ conservation of biodiversity inside as well as outside protected areas; (ii) supporting the planning, management and sustainable use of biodiversity with a view to contribute to alleviating poverty; (iii) seeking a better understanding of local, regional and international trade in biodiversity and supporting related policy reforms as necessary; (iv) strengthening interaction among the countries of the region towards greater regional cooperation, (v) seeking IUCN full time presence in the region as warranted by an effective program implementation; and (vi) strengthening the membership base of IUCN, both in the government and civil society of North Africa, as a measure of securing the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity over the longer term.

In doing so, the new program will refrain from reinventing the wheel and will draw, as best as possible, on the extensive knowledge, capacity, experience and goodwill created by the existing program in terms of seed banks, herbariums, domestication and cultivation of medicinal plants, and related publications.

Developing the new program will thus be an exercise in crafting a fresh vision for the IUCN-SDC collaboration over the next decade in North Africa guided by the needs and potentials of the future but firmly supported by the achievements and learning of the past.

Gland  
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