

# IUCN - The World Conservation Union

## North Africa Biodiversity Programme – Phase III

Synthesis Report  
November 2001 – December 2002

### 1) Background:

Since 1996, with the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), IUCN is coordinating the implementation of an Arid Land Biodiversity Programme. The programme 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 programme.

Phase III of the Programme officially started in November 2001. It has two main objectives:

- promote the conservation of endangered and economically useful plants in North Africa with special reference to medicinal plants and aromatic plants; and,
- promote indigenous knowledge and the 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:

#### a. Regional level:

In the course of the different phases of the programme implementation, organisational and logistical arrangements have increasingly shifted to the regional level, with participating organisations assuming greater responsibility for in-country activities.

The focus would be on methodology development and training, and efficient information and knowledge exchange pertaining to the conservation and sustainable use of medicinal and other economically important plants. Mechanisms adopted would be participatory, and gender-differentiated, giving due attention to indigenous knowledge and technologies;

#### b. National level:

Here, the focus would be on community based activities around in-situ and ex-situ conservation, propagation and cultivation and marketing of medicinal and aromatic plants.

### 2) Regional activities:

For regional coordination of the programme, the Ministry of Environment of Tunisia has offered excellent office facilities in Tunis. The office is now operational. A Programme Coordinator (Ramzi Mejdoub) and an Administrative Assistant (Ms. Souad El-Hedly) have been appointed and are working. The team is seeking to enhance coordination between regional and national activities for a greater synergy. It is also establishing contacts with key national and regional institutions to share experiences and enhance future collaboration.

Further, the Programme has established a "Committee of Experts" comprised of five Medicinal Plants Experts from five countries and experts on participatory approaches and gender. The Experts Group would advise and assist in the Programme implementation. A work plan is defined to prepare a compendium, a data base and one or best practice guides. One of its first activities has been to prepare a

monograph of medicinal plants. Each country has identified 10 plants for work during this year. The work is in progress.

The Regional Office also organised a training workshop on Participatory Approaches and Gender and trained 15 experts from five countries. The trained national experts are expected to further train relevant persons in their respective countries. In addition, this training has also contributed to consolidating knowledge and approaches used by the project and to the identification of other training sessions.

For the gender component, a regional women's network has been established. The network members are participating in the implementation of the programme in their respective countries.

### **3) National activities:**

**3.1 Algeria:** ANN (Agence Nationale pour la Conservation de la Nature) has been essentially responsible for collecting medicinal plants information. Women have been also involved in this work. In the past it was more on need basis. In Phase III, this has been taken forward. The National Coordinator (Mr. Meftah Tewfic) has established a multidisciplinary team of scientists and specialists on gender and participatory approaches.

The activities are focused on the collection of seeds of the identified plants and setting up a seed bank and a nursery, and a pilot project in Batna. The work at the nursery aims at multiplication of certain endemic species and developing a seed bank.

At Batna pilot project site, activities mainly focus on conservation of endangered plants including cultivation and multiplication of medicinal plants. These activities are coordinated by the multidisciplinary team. The inclusion of women in the team seeks to ensure gender integration. Twenty specimens of commonly used medicinal plants were collected, dried and displayed with description. The programme also prepared a monograph of all useful endemic species.

In addition, the development of this project has allowed cooperation with Friedrich Ebert Foundation in organizing a participatory approach training in the conservation of natural resources. ANN is also in contact with "Energie Solaire" and "Centre de Développement des Energies Renouvelables" for coordination of technical work in this field. Links have also been established with the "Centre de Recherche et Développement" (CRD) to study the modalities of cooperation for extensive cultivation and the pharmacology analysis of the identified medicinal (and aromatic) plants.

Thus for, the programme has published (i) a document on medicinal plants in the District of Batna, (ii) a descriptive monograph of certain endemic plants and (iii) a folder on Women and Biodiversity. Several publications in the pipeline include (i) a prospectus on "gender in Algeria, (ii) a note on traditional medicines, and (iii) a Guide to the plants used traditionally in cosmetics.

**3.2 Egypt:** Following the phase one and two of North Africa programme and building on the experience of these phases, the activities of the third phase continued to be centred in the El Omayed Protectorate in North Western Egypt, along the Mediterranean coast at El Alamein, near Alexandria.

For coordination of the programme, the National Coordinator (Dr. Kamal Batanouny) established a multidisciplinary team comprising of a Medicinal Plants expert, consultant in ecology and cultivation of medicinal plants, local site coordinator, gender expert and the Bedouins.

Main Activities have included the collection of seeds, propagules and transplants, and their stocking in the nurseries. The programme has also constructed a Regional Medicinal Plants Centre (RMPC) at El Hammam for conservation of endangered species of medicinal and aromatic plants, and to enhance awareness and research about them. Beside SDC/IUCN, support has

been leveraged from the Governorate of the area and the Academy of Scientific Research. The Centre currently focuses local plants species, but longer term it may also work on species from other parts of North Africa. Even though some delay was experienced in obtaining official permission from local authorities to build the Centre, it is now reaching completion.

Gathering of indigenous knowledge of medicinal and other useful plants through the Bedouins is also one of a major output of the programme. This is done with the help of a gender group established for the purpose. For better organisation of this activity on the site, the programme has helped in the establishment of an NGO: "Egyptian Society for Herbs and Medicinal plants" which would carry out conservation of indigenous knowledge now and in future.

Many experts (40 active) are participating in the programme - Bedouins, scientists, NGOs and other experts and local community practitioners. Thus a large network of conservationists has been identified who are actively involved in the realization of the programme.

The programme imparted training to Bedouins as a measure of enhancing their knowledge and support for the programme. It also produced several technical reports and documents, notably a 32 page booklet on biodiversity for public awareness. Finally, the programme in Egypt established a good coordination with other major national partners in particular with EEAA (Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency), academia, pharmaceuticals, Centre for Applied Research in Medicinal Plants and Desert Research Centre. This will further contribute to enhancing the programme implementation.

- 3.3 **Libya:** The Libyan programme site is in the Western Mountain region. For coordination of the programme the National Coordinator (Dr. Farag Abdulrahman) has established a multidisciplinary team comprising of scientists and practitioners from the local community, including women. This programme makes a part of the government's larger development initiative in the Western Mountain region.

The main activity of the programme has been the collection of data about ecologically and economically useful medicinal (and aromatic) plant species. Extensive reports have been prepared and shared with government partners. The list is being regularly updated and being used by decision makers. The assessment of the threats and practices threatening the ecosystems, species and habitats has been another important activity. The results have been reported and are made used by researchers and practitioners at the central and field levels.

A related activity has been the collection of indigenous knowledge about the conservation and trade of natural resources. This has been done with the participation of local people which would help in enlisting their support in combating habitat degradation.

Collection of seeds of endangered medicinal plants and to conserve them in the national seed bank was another activity undertaken during the programme period. Transplantation of some of the endangered species to protected areas was also successfully carried out.

Gender remained a key focus of the programme and a multidisciplinary gender group was set up and is actively engaged.

Major products were publication of reports on indigenous knowledge and the list of endangered medicinal plants.

- 3.4 **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.

To implement the programme, the National Coordinator (Dr. Hamid Belemlih) established a multidisciplinary team comprising of SPANA "Société pour la Protection de la Nature" (focal

institution) the Regional Directorate of “Eaux et Fôrets”, ASMAPE “Association Marocaine pour l’Environnement”, Institut Agronomique Vétérinaire Hassan II, Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy of Rabat and local NGOs. An expert team has also been set up to technically support the programme.

A detailed list of medicinal plants was established according to the IUCN Red List criteria including traditional medicinal and aromatic plants. About 92 species have been documented, and the list is being further extended. To domesticate and cultivate the useful plants for economic purposes, a chemical analysis and tests of 23 plant species were carried out.

Linkages were established with the micro credit programme with the support of Mohammad V Foundation to further encourage the communities to conserve and cultivate local useful plants.

The main products have been the list of medicinal plants and a report on chemical analysis of medicinal plants.

- 3.5 **Tunisia:** The Tunisian project is situated at Bouyagoum, in the North West of Tunisia, Governorate of Kef. The site being close to Saddine Natural Park. For the coordination of the programme, the National Coordinator (Dr. Mohammad Ali Abrougui) established a multidisciplinary team of technical experts and community based worker including a sub-group on Participatory Approaches and Gender.

The main activities were to organize a participatory assessment of the site which indicated the need for vocational training and cultivation of endangered medicinal plants. A list of plants suitable to desert conditions has been identified and the cultivation of plants is envisaged. Preparatory meetings with local authorities have been held and a joint planning of implementation process has been drawn up. Local government’s support is considered essential for an effective medicinal plants programme at the site.

For effective coordination of the programme in Tunisia, contacts have been established with “Institut National de Recherche agricole de Tunisie”, “Institut de Sylvo-Patorale de Tabaka”, “l’Ecole Nationale des Ingenieurrs de Tunisie”. These are important organisations in Tunisia and their association in the programme implementation will help in achieving the programme results.

No publications as such were produced during the reporting period.

#### **4) Overall Progress – Achievements and Challenges**

In general, the programme has moved forward in achieving its objectives. Notable has been the work in documentation of the medicinal and aromatic plants towards a compendium envisaged in the project. Also, barring exceptions, women are partaking role in implementation, both at the field and programme support level. Also, notable in the reporting period has been the trainings on gender and participatory approaches at the regional level. This has contributed to the much desired networking. The objective of documenting and using traditional knowledge is reflected in national level programmes, albeit more in some countries than others, but it needs a more coherent and targeted effort.

Despite the move forward, the pace of programme implementation has been slow. Reasons common to all parts of the programme include (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 Office and IUCN HQ and, (v) the need for a greater technical support for the field activities both from IUCN and other sources. At the field level, especially where cultivation of medicinal plants has been involved, draught has been taking its toll on survival rates but this is normal to the region characterised by the arid climate.

At the national level, the progress has varied according to the interest, competence and capacity of the partner organisations. Most of the constraints related to capacity and clarity of roles, both in management of the project by IUCN and those at the national level, can be resolved to speed-up the programme implementation. However, as few other aspects may warrant some re-organization and reorientation of the programme or parts of it. It is with this recognition that IUCN has commissioned an internal review of the programme to ensure that the programme objectives are met and fully. The consultant has also been mandated to advise if the programme or a part of it could benefit from a fresh thinking.

The North Africa Biodiversity Programme is not unique in the implementation challenges it faces in a region which is so varied. However, it is unique for its influence in the region, despite its small size, and the good will that exist for what it seems to accomplish. This is a tribute to the wisdom of the architects of the programme, and the resolve of those involved in its implementation, all these years.