

Conservation and Sustainable Use of Globally Significant Biological Diversity in Hazar Nature Reserve on the Caspian Sea Coast

Programme Area: Environment and Sustainable Development		
Budget: 2006 – USD 10,247 2007 – USD 220,540 2008 – USD 326,627 2009 – USD 560,664 2010 – USD 310,520	Project Number: 00051694	Duration: 2006 – 2010
	Funded by: GEF: USD 1,428,600; UNDP: USD 278,000	
	Partners: Ministry of Nature Protection of Turkmenistan, UNDP, Hazar Reserve	
	Executing Agency: UNDP Turkmenistan	

Background:



The National Caspian Action Plan of Turkmenistan calls for the strengthening of Hazar Nature Reserve, developing and implementing a more integrated coastal management and planning approach to resource use on the coast and the improvement of related legal and policy framework. Caspian biological diversity includes 1814 species of flora and fauna; the majority of species are endemics. Out of 314 species of birds, 32 are listed in the Red Book of Turkmenistan and 32 in the Red Book of International Union for Conservation of Nature. Most of the reserve are wetlands of global significance listed in the Ramsar Convention. In addition two of the world's major flyways - the Central Asian-Indian Flyway and the East African Flyway - converge here, making the coastal wetlands of Hazar Reserve (KhR) especially important for migratory birds. The area also includes wintering areas for the Caspian sturgeon and habitats for the Caspian seal.

Project objectives:

The project is designed to provide the tools, the expertise and the arena for stakeholders to adopt new practices in ways that are appropriate for Turkmenistan and that strengthen Turkmenistan's National System of Protected Areas. It aims to demonstrate a new participatory and adaptive approach to conservation and management in Hazar Nature Reserve, to be replicated throughout the country.

More specifically, the project assists the Government of Turkmenistan to:

- i) Secure management capacity and conservation effectiveness of Hazar Nature Reserve;
- ii) Build cross-sector capacity for integrated coastal management and mainstream biodiversity conservation objectives into productive coastal sectors surrounding Hazar Reserve;
- iii) Build trust and goodwill between Hazar Reserve and local communities, strengthening environmental governance over wildlife resources; and
- iv) Mainstream best practices from the project into the National System of Protected Areas of Turkmenistan.

Project achievements:

As a result of the project national specialists became aware of new participatory approaches of nature protection that could be replicated throughout the entire system of protected areas of Turkmenistan. The center for Phenological observations built in 2009 allows for better research of Caspian biodiversity. Newly developed map of the Hazar Reserve gives local people a clear idea about the boundaries of protected areas, where hunting is prohibited. Management effectiveness tracking tool (METT) introduced in Hazar reserve was replicated in 4 other protected areas and included in the list of annual statistic reports. In pilot communities located close to the reserve and dependant on the use of biological resources of the region, alternative means of income generation such as thick-felting, small farming; duck breeding were promoted. The results of 3 annual arial and one land surveys aimed at identifying the number and variety of bird species wintering in Turkmen part of the Caspian sea were published in international scientific magazines, and environmental movies produced by the project were widely distributed.

Strengthening Scientific and Technical Capacity of the Hazar Reserve

- To ensure sustainable management of Reserve a new management Plan was developed, envisaging new areas such as development of ecotourism, participation of local people in the decision making process.
- To strengthen the technical capacity of the Reserve, 3 cross country automobiles, radio equipment and GPS navigator, binoculars, computers and laboratory equipment, such as microscopes, electric scales etc, were purchased.
- Based on the educational needs analysis, agreement was reached with Astrakhan State University of Russia to provide opportunity for the national specialists of PA to study in the fields such as hydrobiology, ichthyology etc.
- Cooperation program signed with Turkmen State University for internships of biology students at Hazar State Reserve.
- Through cooperation established with the Hunters Society, database of all hunters registered in the region was established and regular awareness raising activities on traditional sustainable hunting practices are conducted.
- The legislative base for biodiversity protection activities was strengthened by proposing an amendment to the law «On hydrocarbon resources» which calls for consideration of biological and ecosystem conservation. Seven other amendments were developed and in the process of consideration by the parliament.
- A visitor's center opened at the museum of Hazar reserve provides free access to environmental internet sites.

Cross-sector capacity for Integrated Coastal Management

- 8 senior officials from Ministry of Nature protection, the Committee of Fishery industry of Turkmenistan, the State enterprise on Caspian issues, Hazar state reserve, and administrations of Balkan welayat, Turkmenbashi and Hazar towns and Essenguly etrap visited Sweden on a study tour, organized by the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in 2008, to learn about approaches to environmentally sustainable development of coastal areas.
- Management Information System, developed by the project in Turkmenbashi city, is expected to improve monitoring and prevention of environmental accidents not both for the city and the whole coastal area of Caspian Sea.

Community development and conservation of biological resources

To establish good-will among the people of pilot communities and the reserve, the project helped to develop action plans for the four settlements. Resource centers established in Chekishlyar and Gyzylsuw settlements encourage participation of people in seminars and trainings aimed at building partnership among people and the reserve.

- In two rounds of Small Grant Program, 29 447 USD were allocated for implementation of the approved small projects. In the third round of SGP 10 small projects, with a total budget of 24 000 USD were approved.
- A grant of 5,985 USD was provided for a guest house project in Garagel settlement in 2009, and it has already offered its services to 28 people.



- To share experiences on establishing guest houses a study tour to Mary city was organized for 10 activists of pilot communities.
- A grant of 3,754 USD was given to a woodwork workshop producing window frames and doors in Chekishlyar settlement in 2008. The products of the workshop are in high demand not only the settlement, but also in neighboring communities.
- To facilitate development of eco-tourism the project organized a trip to Uzbekistan for 3 archives of pilot communities-Garagel, Chekishler and Gyzylsuw with the aim to learn their experience on developing ecotourism in local conditions.
- A brochure on thick-felt souvenirs methodology was printed.

Capacity building

- The project has produced environmental movies, «Trip to Gyzyl Suw Island», «Ramsar» convention, «On the banks of dried up river» underlining the importance of biological and historical sites of the region, which were demonstrated and distributing among various organizations and general public.
- National seminars on introducing Management efficiency assessment systems; planning activities in PA; using GIS in reserves; and financing of protected areas were organised.
- Management efficiency assessment system analysis held in Hazar reserve was replicated in Badhyz, Gaplanyr and other state reserves.
- The training center of the project opened in Ashgabat is equipped with computers and high speed internet connection and has a library where university students can use these resources to improve their skills.
- Professional skills of PA specialists were enhanced through trainings on «Training trainees to the modern techniques of teaching and development of study plans» and «Basis of field ornithology».
- To facilitate development of ecotourism, a study trip to Moscow for 4 specialists of the Ministry of Nature Protection of Turkmenistan and the State Committee on Tourism and Sport was organized.

Planned activities:

In 2010 the Project will continue improving management capacity of the Reserve through training, carrying out targeted research activities and field surveys, creation and installation of hunter base software, development of proposals to strengthen the legal base of biodiversity protection. Several specialists will pursue Master's degree at Astrakhan State University. National seminar on "Integrated Coastal Zone Management" will be conducted, and follow up activities will include development of legislative proposals, biodiversity protection programs and sectoral development plans and training of specialists on using the GIS system in coastal zone management. Cooperation in the area of community based natural resource management will continue. Best practices accumulated through the project will be mainstreamed into the work of other state reserves of the country and made available on the project site to all interested parties. First national Bird Guide of Turkmenistan and Snakes of Turkmenistan would be published.

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