



UN
DIP

Targeting MDGs 3 and 7 in the I. R. of Iran in 2008

- with the Carbon Sequestration Project



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Background

The ongoing global climate change is attributed to a larger extent to the extensive use of fossil fuels, which consequently results in the drastic increase of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere. This climate change will alter the environment in which we live in and thus not only affect the lives of people but also the survival of animals and plants. An illustration of this and subsequent threat to the global community is the “silent earthquake” known as desertification.

Desertification is an effect of unsustainable natural resource management practices and climate change. Despite considerable efforts by governmental and non-governmental actors in the I. R. of Iran to address these causes, the country is facing an ever growing size of deserts, which affects both the quality of environment and the livelihoods of the affected local communities. Based on the experiences gained through several decades of government led combat against desertification, the government of Iran recognized that unilateral programmes and projects, in proportion to the human and financial resources invested, were not able to create the expected results. Thus a new strategy which emphasised participatory approaches and solutions were initiated and communicated in cooperation with their partner agencies.

Project Summary
Title:
Carbon Sequestration in the Desertified Rangelands of Hossein Abad
Duration:
15 / 4 2003 until 15/4 2009
Partners:
UNDP - Implementing Agency of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Forest, Rangeland and Watershed Management Organisation (FRWO) of the Government of I. R. Iran - National Executing Agency (National Implementing Partner)
Financial Inputs:
GEF \$ 726 000
Government contribution (parallel funding) \$890 000
Government contribution (in kind) \$ 330 000
UNDP Regular Resources \$ 460 000
Total Project Cost: \$ 2 406 000



About 164 million ha (85%) of land in the I. R. of Iran is classified as arid and semi-arid land, receiving between 30 – 250 mm of annual rainfall. The majority of these (90 million ha) are identified as rangeland areas, who experience an annual rainfall ranging from 50 to 300 mm. Receiving less than 50 mm of annual rainfall, 20% (34 million ha) of the arid and semi-arid lands are known to be desert. It has been estimated that one billion tones of organic carbon can be stored if these areas are reclaimed and managed properly. Due to their size, the rangeland areas of Iran have been recognised to have the greatest

overall potential for carbon storage in comparison to deserts in which carbon sequestration is both low and cost prohibitive. While much of the areas have experienced degradation, with a vegetative cover ranging from 5% to 50%, it is believed that the introduction of various grasses and perennial plants can reclaim some of the vegetative cover lost in these areas. Moreover, the rehabilitation of these lands is expected to give an annual production of about 18 million tone of fodder and about 16 million tonnes of woody biomass.

In the South Khorasan Province, 100 km East of the city of Birjand, is an area, known as Hossein Abad, which projects this problem. Situated close to the Afghan border, the area, which covers 148 000 ha consisting mostly of sparsely vegetated drylands, supports 1000 inhabitants across 30 villages as well as Afghan refugees. Prior to the projects implementation in 2003, the main occupation in the area was animal herding. As a consequence to the ever escalating degradation of land, many of these herders have been forced to take



their flocks to other areas for long periods of time. In addition to this distress and the scarcity of freshwater and vegetation, the area is also known to be affected by sand-laden 'sistani' winds strongly blowing over the region from May to August causing sandstorms, soil erosion and desertification. These winds are not only unpleasant for the inhabitants, they also make arable farming difficult because the sand brought by the wind covers the fields.

The I. R. of Iran is a member of several environmental conventions including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). In 2001, the Government of Iran approached the GEF through UNDP for a medium-sized project that would model the participatory rehabilitation of degraded rangelands in a dry environment. The project was subsequently approved and implementation was initiated in 2003.

Project Design and Implementation

From a global standpoint, the over-riding objective of this pilot project is to sequester atmospheric carbon. The project aims to demonstrate that desertified rangelands can be cost-effectively reclaimed by and for the benefit of the local people. Furthermore the project assumes that there is significant potential, in these areas, to sequester carbon in plants and soil for the overall global benefit. On a national level, the project is in line with the development priorities of the government of Iran in aiming to improve the productivity of the semi-arid areas and to combat desertification. Locally, the rehabilitation of the project site (Hossein Abad) in Southern Khorasan will help improve the socio-economic status of the local communities, and thus eradicate both abject poverty and subsequently enhance the project site's Human Development Index.

The strategy behind the activities in the project is to empower the local community to take active part in the decision making process that manages the land while promoting institutional change that allows and encourages these individuals to participate. In order to ensure the sustainability of the project, emphasis has also been put on ownership and capacity building within the community. The lessons drawn from the collaborative rehabilitation and management of natural resources could help in the application of the project in similar places in Iran and even in other countries with similar topography.

The activities of the project are based on a collaborative rehabilitation and management of natural resources led by community based and community run initiatives. By transferring local planning responsibilities to well organised Village Development Groups (VDGs) the project will help in the strengthening of community based rehabilitation and resource management at the grass-root levels. As a result the target communities will have a greater formal say and responsibility over their own livelihoods. As a result the community will experience better management of natural resources and sustained productivity.

Project component 1: Rangeland Rehabilitation

Actual rehabilitation of the degraded rangelands started in 2005 along with the establishment of the Village Development Groups. Through the full participation of the local communities, these groups helped in maintaining plant nurseries, selecting and replanting patches of land and finally protecting the replanted areas. Through this activity the project aimed to rehabilitate 9000 ha of degraded rangelands.



Project component 2: Mobilization of Local Communities

The project mobilised local communities by helping them to organise themselves in Village Development Groups (VDGs). These VGDs were specially formed to empower not only the communities in general, but also women in particular. By appointing a president and a secretary for each VDG, the local communities were able to fully participate and monitor the activities of the VDGs. The decision making process of each VGD has been based on regular participation of its members. In addition a forum of presidents and secretaries representing all VGDs were established to undertake higher level decisions that were to affect the entire area. In order to give these organisations the necessary legal coverage and identity an umbrella cooperative was also established with the assistance of the project.

Project component 3: Public Awareness and Advocacy Programme

The project has followed a participatory and well pursued documentation strategy. By producing a one-hour documentary film with the help of a group of local and national artists, the project has been able to capture the baseline situation in an artistic manner as well as the progresses made in the subsequent years. Furthermore, the aim of this documentation was to increase awareness among stakeholders and the public regarding the consequences of desertification within the country. Another strategy to increase public awareness has been the planning of workshops and conferences at local and national level. The documentation of the activities engaged in the project, are seen as important sources for public awareness.

Project component 4: Development of Micro-Credit Funds



There is a direct link between poverty and desertification, thus combating desertification should help in working against poverty. One strategy applied by the project is the establishment of a micro-credit mechanism for VDG members. The Micro-credit Fund has been financed both by the project and by the small savings made from VDG members. Every fortnight during the VDG meetings, the villagers offer their own savings into the Micro-credit Fund, which is money that will at a later point in time be re-loaned to them. In 2007 the average saving in each VDG and per member was 4 113 450 RL,

respectively. By selecting a Board of Directors representing the local communities, the targeted area has full ownership over the Micro Credit Fund.

The participatory approach of the project allowed for a sound collaboration among a host of international, national and local partners. The steering committee of the project therefore includes representatives from various ministries representing various sectors of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Environment, the Budget and Planning Authorities in the country as well as the national GEF focal point. In addition most of the activities at the local level are implemented with the help and assistance of the local communities. UNDP has maintained the role of GEF implementing agency by providing oversight services to the day to day activities of the project.

It is expected that the results and achievement of the project can be propagated across the country through the national decision making forum. By replicating the project experiences in areas with similar situations, the outcome could affect the country's ability to counter the global climate change, while simultaneously improving the livelihoods of the rural and marginalised communities as well as halting desertification.

Project Results

The number of beneficiary VDGs have reached to 30. Currently, one third of the position available in the Community Development and Resource management Committee (CDRMC), representing presidents and secretaries of VGDs, are held by women. Thus the project has empowered women to take part in the decision making processes and taken a step forward towards a gender balance in a rather traditional area. Furthermore, this form of communication mobilizations, have strengthened the communities' sense of ownership over the rehabilitated areas. Consequently the communities have taken the role as the protectors of the local area's natural resources, to the extent at which a good level of environmental protection has been met.



The promotion of alternative businesses and provision of vocational training has also been part of the project activities. According to the latest annual report of the project 53% (9) of these activities in the previous year, have been aimed at income generating activities. These represent vocational training courses, which have offered classes in poultry production, wheat cultivation, livestock vaccination, carpet weaving, sewing as well as tapestry making. 203 individuals, of whom more than two thirds were women, have been attracted to these training courses. Consequently these newly acquired skills have been

utilised through the establishment of alternative businesses, funded through small loans granted by the MCF. As a result there is no longer the need for locals to migrate seasonally or due to drought, as during times of distress they can substitute farming with their newly acquired skills.

Another consequence of the project's experience in community mobilisation has been captured and documented through the development of the *"Social Mobilisation Manual for Dryland Resource Management: Based on the Experience of Carbon Sequestration Project in Iran"*. This document provides a step by step guide on how to approach local communities, how to establish collaboration and mutual trust between local communities and practitioners/facilitators. Furthermore, it highlights how one can organise and manage local community organisations to rehabilitate natural resources while enhancing local livelihoods through job diversifications in poor villages.

In addition to this documentation, annual reports have been prepared and published by the end of each calendar year, both in hard copy and electronically through the project's website (www.Ircsp.net). The project has also facilitated the visit of 200 individuals representing NGOs, researchers and others in order to increase the awareness and achievements of the project. The documentations undertaken have helped in increasing the awareness of desertification and the consequences it has had in Iran as well as increasing the awareness on the benefits of applying participatory approaches in the decision making process.

As of the end of June 2008 the local villagers, through their VDGs, have participated in the production of more than 5 000 000 seedlings and re-plantation of almost 9 000 ha of degraded rangelands, either reseeded or re-planted, and put under community-led protection. Taking benefit of the ample sunlight available in the area, a number of solar energy facilities including water desalinators and a solar bath have been put up in Hossein Abad. The VDGs have provided villagers with gas-fuelled ovens and an LPG distribution facility has been established and is run by VDGs thus these actions have led to a decrease in the dependence on fuel wood from 800 kg per household per year to 80 kg. In turn this has resulted in the freeing of numerous working hours spent particularly by young boys and girls in search of fuel woods.



The most important result of the project is that the local population is organized to actively take part in the planning and decision-making for the development of their villages. Drawing from the experience already gained, application of the same local participatory approaches/arrangements employed by this project is being considered by the Forest, Rangeland and Watershed Management Organization and UNDP in other areas. In order to make the project's results sustainable, joint efforts by FRWO and UNDP are underway to present the benefits of the project to the top decision making forums of the country. In 2008, a meeting

was held with the national resources committee of Iran's Expediency Council in Tehran in order to advocate the approaches and achievements of the project.

The project is believed to have a significant impact on the human development index, which in the target area has increased from a baseline of 0.430 in 2003 to 0.480 in 2008.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The project's management set up includes the Project Management Committee, Project Review Committee, Co-Management Booth mainly composed of local representatives. These bodies meet regularly to plan project activities and monitor their progress.

The monitoring of the project's technical outputs and its environmental and socio-economic achievements have been carried out by a group of experts from Birjand University. These results have been documented and published regularly, showing a significant progress not only in producing outputs, but also in local capacities for the sustainability of the project.

In order to take the project a step further towards full sustainability, FRWO and UNDP have agreed to fund a second phase of the project starting in July 2009. In parallel to the funding of UNDP amounting to \$200 000 USD, the government of Iran is expected to provide funding in the region of \$400 000 USD in cash as well as in kind. This will expand the project area into neighboring villages and create the opportunity for the project to not only sequesters carbon in Iran but also to the global fight against climate change and unsustainable natural resource management practices.

For more information on our projects and activities please feel free to contact us on info.ir@undp.org