

CONSERVATION OF IRANIAN WETLANDS PROJECT



Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project (CIWP) has played a lead role in restoring wetlands in Iran since 2005 by introducing the ecosystem approach and establishing a new management system.

In 2014, with the generous contribution from the People and Government of Japan and in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Iran's Department of Environment (DoE), a new component was added to CIWP known as "Modelling Local Community Participation in Restoration of Lake Urmia Through Establishment of Sustainable Agriculture and Biodiversity Conservation". As a result of the achievements obtained in Lake Urmia and to ensure sustainability of the project results, this component was extended for three more years. Beyond this, too replicate the experience of this project, two other wetlands, namely **Bakhtegan Wetland** in **Fars** Province and **Shadegan Wetland** in **Khuzestan** province were added as sites.

THE PROJECT'S MAIN THEMES

The project supports integrated sustainable development practices at the basin level for better management of wetlands ecosystems. These practices include, inter alia:

1. Improving land and water management initiatives such as sustainable agriculture and participatory water resources management;
2. Providing economic and new sustainable livelihoods opportunities such as women's micro-credit fund, provision of support to more water-friendly jobs, and better marketing opportunities;
3. Enhancing intersectoral collaboration and empowering the related institutional capacity for improved wetland conservation and management;
4. Awareness-raising, communication, capacity building, education, participation, and awareness (CEPA).



LAKE URMIA BASIN

As a flagship wetland habitat in Iran suffering from long-term drought, Lake Urmia is the primary pilot site for CIWP. The project supports the restoration efforts of the lake through climate-smart practices, such as sustainable agriculture and diversified livelihoods, to increase irrigation efficiency. The goal is to alleviate pressure on the currently scarce water resources of the lake while supporting the livelihoods of local communities. The project works with over 17,500 farmers in 254 villages around the Lake Urmia basin, Bakhtegan and Shadegan wetlands ((135 West Azerbaijan; 87 East Azerbaijan; 16 Fars; 16 Khuzestan)



As per the recent evaluation of CIWP, the project efforts have resulted in a 26% decrease in the consumption of irrigation water at the farm level and about a 35 to 40% reduction in the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. At the same time, the yield was increased by almost 22.5%. Significantly, the intersectoral cooperation with the involvement of government agencies, e.g., DoE, the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad (MoAJ), the local community, and the private sector was enhanced through the integrated wetland management structure.

Furthermore, the “Green & Digital” initiative builds on the achievements of Conservation of Iranian Wetlands Project and promotes sustainable income-generation practices while serving as a platform to address the digital divide and improve livelihoods in the project area.

To date, 300 local producers who had previously benefited from CIWP have benefited from digital capacity development training offered under “Green and Digital”.

To help these local producers link to digital markets, 10 local digital hubs were established in East and West Azerbaijan provinces. These hubs serve as connecting

points where local producers can package, market, and post their products to Digikala dispatch centers. Nearly half of the local producers who received the training went on to register their products on Digikala. Most of these producer (nearly 84%) were women.

By applying a whole of society approach, “Green & Digital” offers a practical guide to how fit-for-purpose digital solutions can enhance social welfare and prosperity.

SHADEGAN AND BAKHTEGAN

Given the success of the project in the Lake Urmia basin in terms of intersectoral collaboration, community mobilization, women engagement, and mainstreaming climate-smart practices, DoE and UNDP initiated replicating the project approach in two other significant wetlands of Iran, i.e., Shadegan and Bakhtegan wetlands, both of which are prone to the challenges similar to that of Lake Urmia in terms of the competition between wetland and agricultural sectors over water resources.

CIWP initiated its work in those two new sites in mid-2021. Similar to the Lake Urmia basin, the project will build and increase the capacities of the farmer communities on climate-smart practices, such as diversified livelihoods and sustainable agriculture, through the facilitation of local companies and cooperatives. CIWP will also focus on CEPA-related activities to ensure the participation of various stakeholders in wetland conservation. The impact of the CIWP's interventions will be monitored through the data collected from the wetland monitoring stations (for physical attributes) as well as socio-economic studies (for social impact).

WHAT WE DID IN BAKHTEGAN AND SHADEGAN

Through an efficient process, the local community and local government have been briefed and agreed to work with the CIWP. The project entered into agreements with MoAJ as the primary governmental implementing partner in Fars and Khuzestan provinces to secure collaboration with this key government stakeholder. Moreover, experts from key stakeholder agencies, inter alia, MoAJ, DoE, and Regional Water Company, visited Fars and Khuzestan provinces for site selection and consulted with the farmer communities about the project. It should be highlighted that site selection in Khuzestan Province was conducted through the Provincial Committee for Integrated Wetland Management of Shadegan.

Afterwards, as the project's implementing partner (IP), the private sector was involved in the implementation process. To ensure efficient involvement of the IPs, their facilitator teams in two provinces received orientation training on the working modalities and approaches to work with the local communities in the two wetlands.

Notably, regarding CEPA activities, one CEPA center was equipped in each wetland. Moreover, for awareness-raising and capacity development purposes, the following steps were taken:

- Organizing workshops on cross-sectoral cooperation for the experts from MoAJ, DoE, the governor's office, and water companies;
- Organizing training workshops on participatory approaches for IPs;
- Organizing online courses on water monitoring as well as livelihood concepts and methods for the IPs;
- Organizing capacity development and planning workshops for the experts from province integrated wetland management secretariats.

EXPECTED RESULTS

The project is expected to contribute to achieving or sustaining the following in the three sites:

- Wetland management and regular monitoring in a participatory fashion;
- Embed decision support systems in water and wetland management;
- Support the stakeholders regarding learning and employing climate-smart practices;
- Support wetland-friendly livelihoods and facilitate access to markets, especially through digital marketing.

These will collectively lead to increased environmental, social, and economic resilience, sustainable management of land and water, biodiversity conservation and circular economy.



Below is a table of achievements

Target Activities		Unit	Quantitative Progress
Ecosystem Approach	Wetlands implementing the ecosystem approach with participatory involvement of stakeholders	No.	47 (4 in 2023)
	Wetland management committees headed by governors and local authorities	No.	25
Sustainable Agriculture	Pilot villages	No.	254 (135 West Azerbaijan; 87 East Azerbaijan; 16 Fars; 16 Khuzestan)
	Trained farmers	No. of People	5600
	Training courses and workshops	No.	646
	Land area covered	Hectare	6744 (3456 West Azerbaijan; 2200 East Azerbaijan; 443 Fars; 645 Khuzestan)
	Average in-farm water saving	Percent	27
	Reduction of chemical inputs consumption	Percent	25-30
	Average increase in production	Percent	23.7
Livelihoods Diversification	Pilot villages	No.	78 (34 East Azerbaijan; 22 West Azerbaijan; 10 Fars; 12 Khuzestan)
	Budget allocated for purchasing equipment and women's micro-credit fund	IRR Rials	6'800'000'000
	Increase of employment for men and women	Percent	2.37
	Increase of employment for women	Percent	3.97

	Growth rate of the average income of women	IRR Rials	from 1,750,000 to 4,250,000 IRR Rials per month
	Rural women and men active in livelihood groups	No.	2743 (2172 Women; 232 Men / 80% Women)
	Courses on conserving wetlands and environmental concepts and diversifying livelihoods	No.	614
	Specialized livelihood training courses	No.	507
	Livelihood groups	No.	588
	NGOs and local IPs	No.	42
CEPA	Awareness raising and capacity building events	No. of People	1570
	Distributed awareness-raising packages among local communities on World Wetlands Day 2023.	No.	1075
	Young Adult Book Reading Competition in West Azerbaijan	No. of People	542
	Publication of Project's achievements at the Wetland Link International (WLI)	No.	1