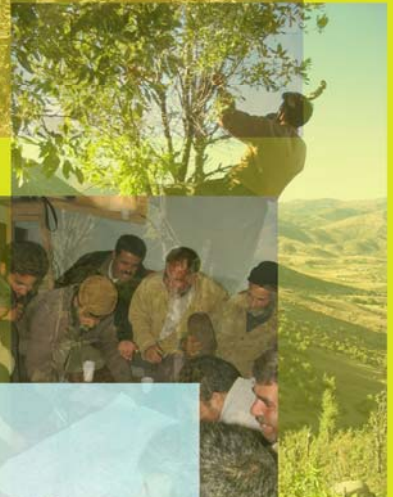


# UNDP/GEF/SGP/IRAN





## Story of GEF/SGP in Iran

*The SGP is not merely a matter of scale. Rather, it is a fruit of two- three decades of experience built up at the United Nations.*

The Small Grant Programme (SGP) began in 1992, with the aim of supporting the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) in the developing countries. Now operational in 122 countries and more than 12,000 grants awarded worldwide, SGP supports projects of non-governmental and community-based organizations in developing countries demonstrating that community action can maintain the fine balance between human needs and environmental imperatives.

The SGP focuses on alternative livelihoods, climate change, biodiversity, conservation of international water bodies, reduction of chemical pollution, and prevention of land degradation.

SGP was introduced to the governmental and non-governmental institutions in Iran for the first time in 2001. The first project, approved at the same year, was on *“community-based conservation of the tradi-*

*tional waterfowl trapping practice (Damgahs) as overwintering habitats of migrating birds, including the Siberian crane”*. Subsequently, various institutions requested for participation with SGP. Within the eight years passed since the initiation of the Programme in Iran, more than 160 projects have been accomplished, or are ongoing, in different provinces. The majority of these projects have been implemented by the CSOs and CBOs, often with financial, technical or policy support of the Government.

In SGP projects, local communities play a key role both in implementing and deepening the projects.

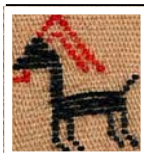
A main reason for active participation of local commu-

nities in SGP projects may be attributed to diversity of activities in these projects, which are usually defined taking into account the biological diversity in different regions. Another reason for the high level of motivation



*Uramanat. Kurdistan.*

among the beneficiaries of the Project is identification and introduction of alternative livelihoods for local communities.





## The SGP's wide spectrum of impacts

*The SGP/Iran has brought about a wide spectrum of impacts at various levels, including the local communities, civil society, government body, and academic institutions.*

### *The Civil Society*

The SGP began in Iran about nine years after its international launching. Yet it was timely, as the growth of civil society organizations, in particular in the area of environment, in the 1990s had created a promising ground for implementation of the programme. From the other hand, to move from the public awareness and sensitization to higher stages of environmental action, there was a need for enabling grounds (technical, financial and policy support).

It was in this setting that the SGP was introduced to Iran and was widely welcomed by the government institutions and NGOs, mainly because:

- The programme had environmental goals matching the needs of the time.
- It provided technical and financial support to institutions pursuing such goals, and
- It established optimum coordination with the relevant governmental institutions.

In addition, the role of the NGO networks cannot be ignored, as they created an interactive atmosphere among the member CSOs and other actors. Some of these networks were present in the first Steering Committee of the programme.

The establishment of the national network of CSOs, which attended the programmes Steering Committee from the earliest dates, followed by the regional networks, had a marked impact on strengthening the NGOS across the country.



*Noor– Mazandran. Project No: I RA-G52-2002-016(IRA98G52)*



## Specialized human resources:

### External implementers

In most of the SGP projects, the external implementers are supported by local groups. The nature and diversity of the subjects in the SGP projects required high levels of expertise and skills. Thus, the projects had to utilize local as well as external experts and consultants. This provided good opportunities for young project implementers to get exposed to the latest participatory approaches and subject matter information. Gradually, these young implementers, university students or fresh graduates in most cases, became experienced and skilled practitioners themselves. Many were later recruited as senior professionals by the government or international institutions. Others found their ways to post graduate programmes.

#### Independent experts

From the outset, the GEF/SGP/Iran benefited from technical support of independent experts, in particular in environmental fields. The guidance and expert opinions provided by such experts shed light on the orientation of the programme in the country. In addition, their involvement in many SGP projects strengthened the structure of the programme and contributed to higher performance standards.

#### Local Community facilitators

Before the GEF/SGP, few local community facilitators existed in Iran. The GEF/SGP projects fostered a sizable number of facilitators at different levels. Some have excelled in participatory planning and research skills, making them capable of providing policy advice to decision makers.



*Fritillaria Imperialis: an ICCA project by Bakhtyari Tribe*

#### Local facilitators

Due to participatory nature of the projects, local communities were heavily involved in them. In every project, the members of the local community undertook different roles and tasks. As a result, many positive impacts were generated. Increased number of local facilitators, documentation of the indigenous knowledge, and actualized managerial capabilities of the local people are obvious examples of such impacts.

#### Local expertise resources

Identification and utilization of the local expert resources was a major achievement of the GEF/SGP programme. With a combination of their indigenous knowledge and exposure to new participatory approaches, the local experts played a key role in implementing the GEF/SGP projects.



## Examples of the local expertise

### **Forest settlers:**

Before the participatory projects, the formal experts viewed the method as destructive to the forests. But in a participatory process, the local forest settlers proved that this traditional method actually contributes to sustainable management of the forests. It is now formally recognized by the Government. In different similar cases, the use of forest settlers as local facilitators or trainers has led to the discovery of local solutions to enhancing the balance between livelihoods and forest conservation.



Khafri. Isfahan. Project No:IRA/05/06 (54th)

**Farmers:** Having acquired high technical know-how, the IPM farmers have been invited to national and local decision making committees in several cases. The IPM farmers' network, created with the help of FAO, has contributed to a number of agriculture policy improvements at the national level.



Rice Farm. Fereydoonkenar. IPM project

**Fishermen:** With a strong sense of affiliation to, and a rich indigenous knowledge of, the marine resources, fishermen played a key role in marine resources management and sustainability initiatives.



Fishermen. Artificial reefs. Qeshm Island

**Climber Groups:** The Dena empowerment project, implemented in Zagros region in 2002, resulted in deep linkage between climbers and the local community.

In this project, the climbers got involved in local community development, utilizing the science of climbing for sustainable development. Introducing eco-tourism as an alternative livelihood, the climbers helped



Fishermen. Mangrove conservation. Gowater Bay. Baluchistan

the local communities in initiating similar projects in the region. The project provided a unique example for approaches to local community participation.



# Vulnerable groups

Having its basis on three pillars of livelihoods, protection and local community participation, the SGP projects provided for active participation and empowerment of vulnerable groups in different areas. This impact may be discussed in two main categories, the beneficiaries (local communities) and project implementers:

## Beneficiaries (the local communities):

### Women, the youth and children

Implemented in the remotest parts of the country, the SGP projects provided an opportunity for children, the youth, and the women in particular, to get involved in participatory process, leading to their empowerment. In many deprived villages, introduction of SGP projects resulted in higher rates of girls' school enrolment, more involvement of women in income generating activities, and their higher participation in social affairs. Examples include revamping handicraft by the women and training of young eco-tour guides in Qeshm Island, or the increased number of girls enrolled at the school of a remote Sistani village from just three in 2001 to over 97.



Baluchi Students: Project No: IRA-G52-2002-004(IRA98G52)

## Implementers:

### Educated urban women

Besides contributing to local community empowerment for gender mainstreaming, the SGP has opened up new windows for the involvement of educated urban girls and women in planning and implementing projects for local community development and protection of the environment.

In spite of the existing cultural and social limitations regarding the participation of women in the social arena, there are remarkable examples of females implementing SGP projects in deprived villages. The women involved at different levels of project planning and implementation have gained very first hand experiences and skills in handling similar projects, even at higher scales. From the early years of the SGP in Iran, several small institutions were created by the women and youth, which submitted project proposals for implementation in different regions.



IRA-G52-2003-027(IRA98G52)





# Initiatives and innovations

A main reason to applicability of the indigenous knowledge is that it offers diverse solutions in accordance with the local specific conditions and available resources. By contrast, generic top-down instructions usually fail during implementation in the local level as they are not often tailored to the local conditions and the needs and aspiration of the main beneficiaries,

Cognizant of the intrinsic values of the indigenous knowledge, the SGP approved small projects for different environmental conditions in an attempt to identifying and reintroduction of

the indigenous knowledge. In several cases, the indigenous knowledge was used even to formulate modern methods and technologies based on the indigenous knowledge, leading to participatory conservation of the natural resources. A few examples include: "Artificial reefs", "handicraft for extending environmental protection

(Conservation Art)", 'training volunteer environment guards', 'training local eco-tour guides', 'CBOs for conservation and sustainable livelihoods', 'ecotourism for conservation', 'art & nature clubs', 'revitalizing traditional waterfowl trapping practice', 'rehabilitation of Siranguli wetlands',

'production of chemical-free rice and other crops combining indigenous knowledge and modern technology', 'green climbing route for conservation and rehabilitation of natural resources in Kurdistan',

'integrated forest management and natural resources rehabilitation', 'participatory environmental impact assessment', and 'participatory local development funds'. The achievements of the SGP projects have inspired several graduate and post-graduate dissertations.



## Economic empowerment and sustainable livelihoods

Ways and means for empowering the local community has been a central question in planning and implementing most of the projects under this programme. Not all the experiences have been successful. There are, however, quite a number of cases that can be presented as applicable models for micro-credit or sustainable development. 'Apiculture by rural women in Rameh village', 'chemical-free rice production in Sooteh village', and 'garden city in post-quack Bam', are just a few such examples.



Photo by: HR.Sabaghi. Khafr.Isfahan. Project no: IRA/05/06 (54th)

## Policy and decision making

In spite of uninterrupted efforts of the relevant government agencies, there are increasing risks and threats to the environment throughout the country. The shift in natural resources management from traditional participatory systems to centralized governmental administration and the overlap between the role of the government and the people in natural resources man-

agement have led to serious gaps and obstacles in the conservation of natural resources and the environment. Many local beneficiaries have lost interest in their ecosystem because of losing ownership on resources such as qanats, communal lands and rangelands. This contributes to degradation of natural resources.

The government authorities and policy makers adopt a range of measures to reverse the situation. Optimum change, however, can only be achieved through national will. The SGP has stimulated such a national will through widening the opportunities for interaction between the government, CSOs and local communities. Many SGP projects owe their success to active presence and participa-

tion of the government authorities.

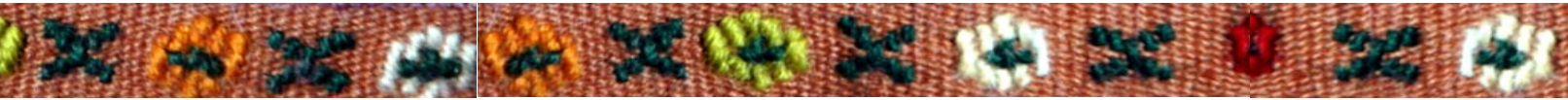
In many SGP project, success has been achieved through changing the attitudes and approaches of stakeholders to conservation of the environment and participation of the local communities. In several cases, the relevant institutions have amended the rules, regulations and policies in line with the goals promoted by these projects. Examples include expansion of no-hunting zones, prohibition of land conversion, reorienting or stopping environmentally degrading construction projects, and official recognition of the traditional waterfowl trapping practice as a way of sustainable natural resources management.



Local authorities are informed about the projects goals







## *The local community participation in development processes*

In spite of a long history of participatory natural resources management, today these resources are threatened worse than ever. Many factors contribute to this situation, including new land use patterns, and dissolution of the traditional and conventional natural resources management systems. After the so called White Revolution and the Land Reform, leading to nationalization of the natural resources, the traditional ways of conservation were discarded, as the new owners favored modern management. The role of the local communities in conservation and development was largely ignored, and gradually, the gap between the government and the people widened. The rural people and nomads are often viewed as the main causes of ecological deterioration. This is while throughout the history, they acted as the best protectors of the natural resources and the environment.

With the increasing global attention to participatory and local approaches to natural resources conservation, the governments and other environmental actors have recognized rehabilitation of the indigenous knowledge as a sustainable way of conserving natural resources. In many countries, attempts are ongoing to institutionalize participatory approaches to development.

As the GEF/Small Grant Programme was new to Iran, it gradually built up the grounds for the involvement of the local communities in implementing the projects. In many provinces, the organized local groups who first entered into participation with the programme as beneficiaries, later on were encouraged to define and implement new projects. This approach has contributed to sustainability of the programme impacts. Projects implemented by the local community in Qeshm Island (known as 'Qeshm projects') and Fereidoonkenar (IPM Rice) are good examples in this regard.

In projects implemented by the local communities, the scope and diversity of the participating beneficiaries (eg. fishermen, women and the youth) were much higher. This is mainly because these projects help in rediscovery and actualization of the often neglected capabilities of the local people. The participating groups gain a better understanding of the importance, in particular for the urban people, of the goods, services and knowledge generated by the local community. This motivates them to take collective actions to offer their native knowledge and culture to the urban people.



*Mangrove nursery. Project no: IRA-G52-2002-004(IRA98G52)*



## *A learning by doing process*

With the rapid growth in ICT technologies, radical changes have occurred in access to information and communication. For effective use of these technologies particularly in the rural areas, however, there is a need to prepare the grounds for learning.

The GEF/SGP helped the project implementers in accessing the latest global knowledge on conservation methodologies and other fields. The project implementers were usually eager to learn from similar experiences across the world to improve their own work. In several cases the project implementers could manage, through effective communication, to invite and gain the support of international experts to their projects, or to find an opportunity to visit successful projects in other countries.

### *Large scale national projects*

With the implementation of an increasing number of participatory projects across the country, the wealth of information on the lessons learned from such projects grew substantially. It was demonstrated that how successfully local community participation leads to enhancing interaction between the people, the planners and the decision makers at different levels. In many a case, the local communities and farmers came up with solutions that later on were adopted at the national level. Examples of such impact include the 'the second phase of the national land and water programme', 'turtles conservation projects', 'training volunteer environment guards', and 'preservation of Bustard'.





# Literature Generation

The volume of documents generated under the GEF/SGP attests to hard documentation work done by the project implementers. This is partially attributed to the importance attached by the programme to documenting the lessons learned through the local projects, and to several capacity building sessions, which led to increasing the implementer's skills in project management and documentation. The joint sessions and workshop organized for exchanging information and experiences also led to the establishment of a network of activists, which resulted in strengthening the social capital. This achievement may be briefly discussed in three dimensions:

1. **Knowledge services:** this was achieved through organizing training and experience sharing workshops, field visits, inviting experts, supply of publications and sources, and consultations sessions.

2. **Knowledge generation:** The emphasis attached to documenting the activities and lessons learned from the projects turned the GEF/SGP

programme into a rich source of information on conservation and development in the country: guidelines, articles, papers, movies, brochures, databases, educational materials, photos albums, games and other knowledge products.

3. **Knowledge networking:** Taking a network in the sense of a group of individuals or institutions interacting directly or indirectly on a specific goal, it may be stated that the GEF/SGP has supported the initiation of a number of thematic networks. Examples are IPM/FFS, aquatic projects, conservation ecotourism, participatory forest management, facilitation, etc. Which sustainability of them largely depends on the sustainability of the impacts generated by the projects.



Photo by HR.Sabaghi. Awareness raising workshop for children-Khafr. Isfahan

## GEF/ Small Grants Programme Country Portfolio, 2001-2013

Operational Phase 2,3,4 & 5 from 2001-2013	Amount Grant Allocated	No. of Projects	No. Of Open Projects
Operational Phase 5 (Year 1 & 2) 2011-2013	\$1,535,040	43	43
SGP Grant Allocated to Projects (OP2 to OP4)	\$4,127,000	181	24
Total SGP Allocation	\$5,662,040		
Total Cash Co-funding	\$5,245,599		
Total Co-funding	\$9,816,029		
UNDP TRAC Fund- 2 Bam Projects (Ended)	\$207,000		



## UNDP/GEF/SGP

For almost two decades, the Small Grants Programme has been working with communities around the world to combat the most critical environmental problems and has successfully demonstrated that supporting communities in their efforts to achieve more sustainable livelihoods is not only possible, but extremely important in bringing change and achieving global environmental benefits.

With presence in **122 countries** and more than **12,000 grants** awarded worldwide, SGP supports projects of non-governmental and community-based organizations in developing countries demonstrating that community action can maintain the fine balance between human needs and environmental imperatives.

*From the SGP website: <http://sgp.undp.org> or  
<http://www.undp.org/sgp>*



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