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Talesh Indigenous and Community Conserved Area

Governance Assessment Report



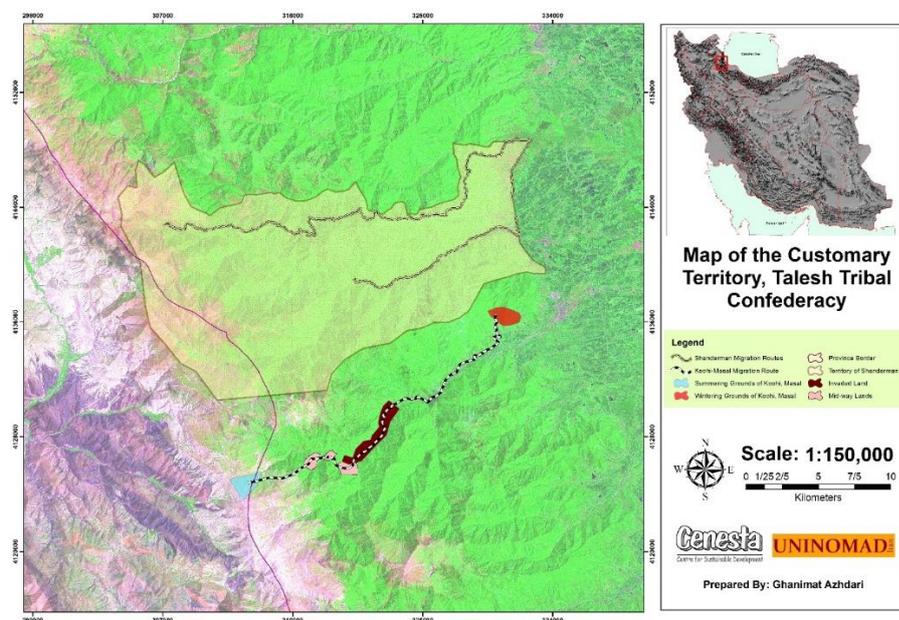
Center for Sustainable Development and Environment (Cenesta)



1. Demography of the community

According to Statistical center of Iran 2008, population of Talesh County, which includes main territories of Talesh community, amounts up to 200,000, in 50,000 households. *Talesh* Mountains start from *Sepidroud River* and extends up to *Astara Chay*. People who live in between *Talesh* Mountains and Caspian Sea are called *Talesh* or *Taleshan*, many of whom have had nomadic or transhumant pastoralist lifestyle.

Talesh County, titled as *Hashtpar* in the past, consisted of three lower townships of Hashtpar, Astara and Fooman, where most Talesh tribes reside today. However, the Talesh population is not limited to this County. Talesh people spread over northern *Gilan* and even Republic of Azerbaijan. In the past, Talesh territory included *Fooman*, *Toolam*, *Gaskar*, *Doolab*, *Tool & Naav*, *Astara* and *Lankaran*. (Abdoli, 1992; Bazin, 1367)



Shanderman tribes' territory
Source: Cenesta

2. History background of Talesh indigenous people

2.1. Origin of the community

The name *Talesh* is originated from the word *Tilasan* that in turn was the name of woolen garments that *Talesh* pastoralists used to wear in old ages. Other explanation is that *Talesh* is the Arabic version for the word *Kadoos*, the ancient civilization who lived in this region thousands years ago. Historical evidence from ancient graveyards shows that *Kadoos* civilization/state aged back to *Maad* dynasty era in Iran. The first habitants of the *Talesh* seem to be the nomadic pastoralists who used the region only as their summering grounds but due to over population of their lands in Azerbaijan gradually moved to *Talesh*. (Abdoli, 1992)



Rood khan' castle (*Ghal'eh Rood khan*) near *Fouman*.

2.2. Historical turning points

Before the advent of Qajar dynasty (beginning of 19th century), the rulers of Talesh enjoyed some level of independence although obeyed *Gilan* authority in broader political matters. Following the conflicts between khans of Nameen region, Fath Ali Shah Qajar separated Talesh from Azerbaijan province. The region was subsequently divided into five main blocks of *Kargaanrood*, *Asalem*, *Taleshdoolab*, *Shanderman* and *Masal* which were titled *Khamseh Talesh* (Talesh's five). Each region then were given independence by Shah. New delineation was controversial because more than five tribes used to reside in these five territories. In *Taleshdoolab* Block for instance two tribes of *Khash e Bari* and *Taleshdoolaj* resided. Similarly

Kargaanrood wasn't home just to *Kargaaneh raj* tribe. Apparently wage delineation was deliberately planned to put local tribes in quarrel and make sure they don't riot against the central government. In Pahlavi era old demarcations of five blocks were officially annulled and region was reorganized into three parts of Karganrood, Taleshdoolab and Masal & Shanderman. However, new division was also influenced by Talesh Khans. (Abdoli, 1992)

3. Social structure

3.1. Cultural identity

Being a Talesh tribespeople is not only about knowing the tribe's social structure, sharing same pastures and being attributed to the same ancestors; having livestock is also of crucial importance that implies migrating between summering and wintering grounds. Some tribal divisions in Talesh even have a non Talesh origins. For instance, Shiraz sub tribe of Khasheh Bar tribe are decendants of Amir Bay who was sent to exile from Shiraz (located in South Iran) to Talesh. He married a Taleshi woman and she gave birth to eight children that their names are the names of eight clans that today still exist within Shiraz sub tribe. (Abdoli, 1992)

Today it is estimated that about 300,000 people speak Taleshi which is the spoken Language of Talesh. In Northern *Talesh*, because of migration of Turkish speaking people of Azerbaijan and their dominance on market and trade, Turkish language has been prevailed. In Astara for instance the language has totally turned to Turkish. This is mainly due to the fact that until 1963 the city Astara was under surveillance of Ardebil (one of the main Azerbaijan cities). In Middle (Taleshdoolab, Masal and Shanderman) and Southern Talesh (Foomanat), however, the Taleshi has been less affected except for South that the Taleshi is slightly influenced by Gilaki language. However, although two ethnics of *Talesh* and *Gilak* live in close proximity, none has been much affected from the other in terms of language. Both people usually understand and speak each other's language. (Abdoli, 1992)

By West, Talesh people of Middle and South are neighbors with *Tats*, Persian speaking nomads of provinces Zanzan and Azerbaijan. Taleshi and Tati (ancient language of Azerbaijan) are two division of the same ancient Iranian language that evolved in different settings. In comparison with Tati, Taleshi has remained less manipulated. (Abdoli, 1992)

3.2. Value and belief system

Until Teymoori era Talesh people were still Sunni Muslims of Shafei division but due to the conquers and propaganda of *Kiaian* dynesti of *Gilan Bieh Pish*, who were Shieh Muslims, against Es'haaghian dynasty (Shafei Muslems) the Shiah fate was spread through the Talesh territory. This was also followed by Safavid kings efforts in

developing the Shaih fate in the country. Today, Talesh people of west bank of Sepidrood River through the boundaries of *Taleshdoolab* are Muslim of Shia fate while those spreading from Taleshdoolab towards city Astara are Sunnites. (Abdoli, 1992; Bazin, 1367)



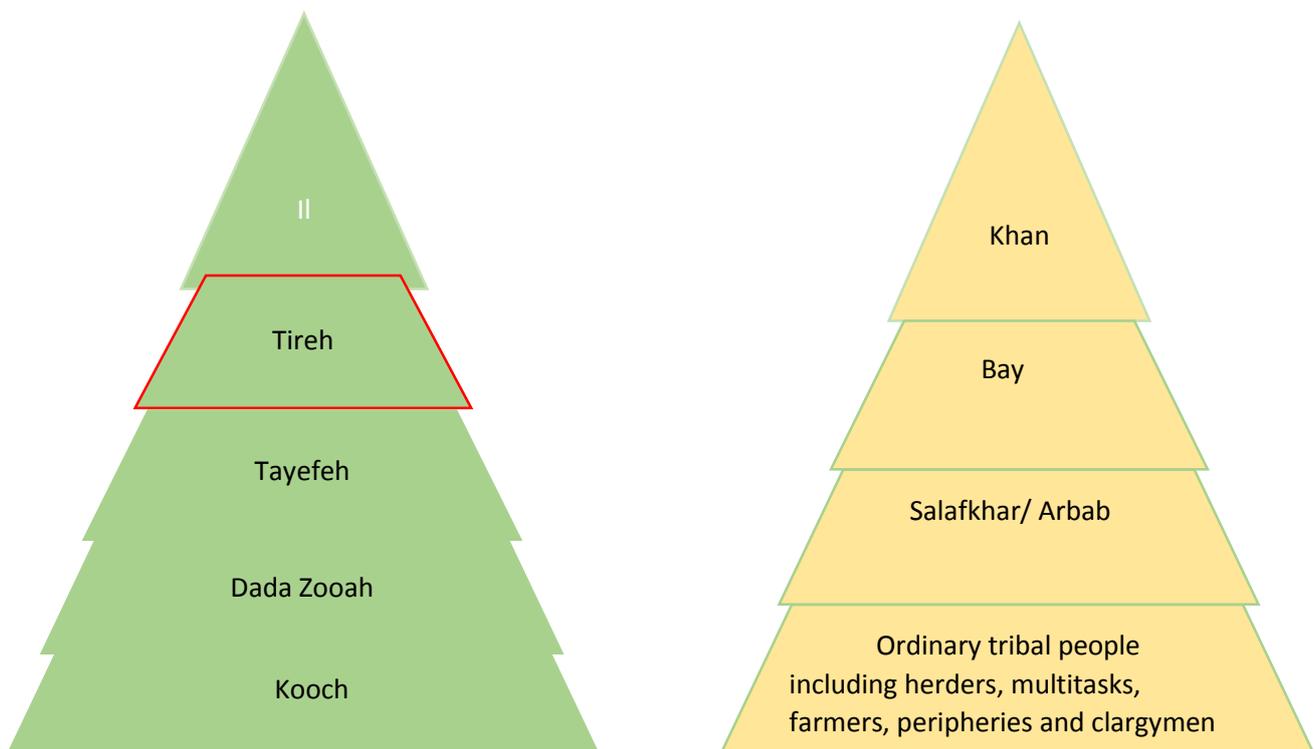
Talesh man with his wife
Source: Cenesta

3.3. Women's role within the community

Women's rights in Talesh territory, like elsewhere in Iran, associate with the country's national laws. In local context however their rights and responsibilities are affected by very old culture and tradition. In Talesh, responsibilities got by each individual determine their position in family and society. Women's role similarly is defined based on their position in community's production system. Although in Talesh men are considered as head of family, women have an independent personality and rarely face any limitation from their men. In comparison with many other territories in Iran, prejudice and restriction over women is less frequent in Talesh territories. Talesh women are much more present in social arena and they are usually much willing to engage in social activities. (Abdoli, 1992; Kouhi, 2015; Marzbani, 2015; Parsi 2015)

3.4. Tribe structure

Before land reforms in 1963, Khans and Bays ruled the tribes in Talesh. Traditional role of *Salaf khars (Arbabs)* that used to buy livestock and their products from tribespeople were also replaced by government induced banks and cooperatives. Hence the political and economic power of local leaders were reduced. At the time, in Talesh the class difference is based on difference in wealth and income and among well off, mediocre and multi task herders. Contrary to the other tribal structures in Iran, in Talesh *tireh* (what is called sub-tribe in English) comes before *Tayefeh* (tribe in English)! *Tireh* is in fact broader division that encompass numbers of *Tayefeh*'s. (Abdoli, 1992; Bazin, 1367)



Talesh main tribes include *Kargarou, Asalemi, Taleshdoolae, Khasheh Bari, Shandermani and Masali*. Tribal structure is almost same as above in all these tribes. (Feyz Zadeh, 2015)

According to Abdoli (1992) five traditional types of occupation existed in Talesh territory. At the time however many of them have adopted urban lifestyle and occupations.

Damdar (Herder): Tribespeople who depend on sheep rearing for subsistence and migrate between summering and wintering grounds through the year. They shelter in summering grounds include tents and wooden houses, and in wintering grounds include tents and mud made houses.

Chandpishesh (Multi-task): tribespeople who live in mountainous areas and they rely on cow, goats, sheep rearing and bee keeping as well as growing wheat and corn for

their subsistence. They don't use tents as their home although they migrate between summering and pasturing ground more than twice a year.

Keshavarz (Peasant): tribespeople who live in plain areas and their main source of livelihood is based on rice farming and gardening although they might grow cows, bulls, horses and bees as supplementary source of livelihoods. During summer, they might migrate to mountains for a month to escape the high temperature and humidity.

Piramooni (Peripheri): these are tribespeople who have left their traditional position and occupy jobs such as construction worker, government officials, commerce, etc.

Roohani (Clergymen): this group, who live among the Sunni tribespeople of Talesh, have a respected position among the community and their role is to address people's religious needs. For their subsistence, they depend on people's donations and charity.

One of the main social groups in Talesh are Clergymen who in turn divide into four groups including:

- Sheykh: they hold the highest rank among clergymen in Talesh. Sheikhs among the Sunni Talesh are equal to Ayatollahs among the Shieh. They attribute to Prophet Mohammad's companions.
- Afandi: they study religion. Their main role is to wed and divorce, make judgments and sentence religious decrees
- Molla: they are in lower rank compare to Sheikhs and Afandis. They usually take preliminary religious courses and know intermediate Farsi and Arabic.
- Soofi: they are religious people who know reading Quran and religious affairs. They are usually responsible for managing sacred graves.

4. Talesh CBO and ICCA

In March 2015, Cenesta launched a field trip in Talesh territory to carry out a set of governance, ecological and territorial assessments in this region. During the trip various data on Talesh people's social structure, sources of livelihoods, indigenous natural resource management skills, their relation with external actors, etc. was gathered. For doing this, a set of individual interviews with local leaders, elders, herders and official authorities were carried out. During a meeting with Marzbani *Shanderman's* khan and his wife Shirin Parsi was carried out. Shirin Parsi has already mobilized local women to produce handcrafts and she is welcoming any feasibility study and marketing that might help promotion of Talesh women made indigenous products. In the same meeting, for the first time, the idea of registering a Sustainable livelihood fund (Sanduq) for Talesh indigenous people was recommended by Cenesta. It was decided that Marzbani family help Cenesta with organising Talesh people for next meetings and discussions. Ever since, subsequent meetings between Shirin Parsi and Cenesta's livelihoods team has been held to work on her livelihoods plan for Talesh women.

4.1. Governance system of ICCA

4.1.1. Land ownership

There are two types of Land ownership in Talesh territory; Private and common-pool pastures. Pastures located in wintering grounds are usually owned privately by Talesh herders while those located in summering grounds are usually owned in common. Private pastures usually have clear boundaries and are accurately separated by rivers, rocks, hills, etc. Owners have letters of agreement as proof of their ownership right over land. Common-pool lands of summering grounds however are held in common and are conventionally recognized by Tribes and/or lower divisions. Territorial boundaries for each family and/or clan within communal pastures are notwithstanding well-defined and respected. Territories are distinct from each other through natural signs.

Before the advent of Pahlavi dynasty, local khans used to have full ownership rights over most lands in Talesh. After death of *Sardar Moghtadaer*, influential khan of Talesh, pastures were partly occupied by some tribespeople and partly were confiscated by military and government officials (who usually used to sublet them to others). Finally, after Nationalisation of Forests and Rangelands, Talesh herders, who were in fact conventional appropriators of pastures, gained some access, use and management rights over forest lands.



Shanderman heights

Source: Cenesta

Land reforms

Land reforms and Nationalisation of rangelands in 1960s drastically decreased Talesh people's dependence on land. According to land reforms decree, the large scale farmlands were confiscated, divided into small plots, and ownership rights were given to small farmers. As there were less agricultural lands in mountains, social relation and production chain was less affected by land reforms. Although land reforms mostly affected those in Plains, tribespeople in mountains got the consequences shortly after.

Ordinary tribespeople and peasants rarely had ownership rights over land. They thereby relied on the livestock or crops most of which they shared with landowners (Khans, Bays). Nationalisation of natural resources putted an end to tribespeople's dependence to khans. Although after nationalisation of natural resources forests dwellers were prohibited from use and appropriation of forest de jure, they gained de facto ownership rights that didn't have before. Besides, they could gradually flinch the old responsibilities they held vis-à-vis landlords. (Abdoli, 2015; Abdoli, 1992; Bazin, 1367; Katouzian, 1974)

4.1.2. Natural resource management mechanisms in ICCA

For sustainable use of resources, Talesh people had developed various forms of cooperation as their adaptive strategies that some of them are explained below:

Mamir (Namir): in this form of cooperation a herder with surplus of livestock would leave certain number of animals with a herder with enough pastures for a certain period of time (e.g. two years). Meanwhile, produced dairy, wools, etc. would be equally divided between owner and handler. At the end of the period, the owner would take whole his herd back.

Behoro bedar (eat and keep): it's a cooperation in which two herders each provide 50 sheep and exchange a hundred sheep agreement between themselves. In this agreement one herder would bind to keep the sheep and the other provides the pasture or pays for the value of the pasture needed to maintain a hundred sheep. In addition to this, each year, the lender has to provide a pair of shoe, a sickle, and some amount of salt and for each pair of sheep, seven kilos of rice. Each year, the products will be equally divided between owner and keeper. Also each year in different occasions, one sheep and one lamb is given to owner as a gift. Meanwhile, the sheep bred are equally divided between owner and keeper.

Ejarehdari (leasehold): this is an agreement for a year between landlord and tenant over a rice paddy in which after harvest the tenant would pay 6 to 8 percent of the harvest to the landlord, depending on the quality of paddy, its proximity to market, etc.

Kerechi: this is usually the title of women who work on rice paddies. In the past Talesh people who would live in mountains were usually unwilling to work in plains.

Notwithstanding, in recent years more Talesh women are willing to get involved as *kerechi*.

Yavari (cooperation): Talesh people have culture of helping each other in different cases including rice harvest. When a Talesh tribespeople needs a hand for specific activity others would cooperate to help him/her. In return, he would do the same for the others in different cases.



Source: Cenesta

5. Threats and opportunities in ICCA

According to Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), a threat to a protected area is defined as “Any human activity or related process that has negative impact on key biodiversity features, ecological processes or cultural assets within a protected area” (CBD 2014a). Kothari et al (2012) have identified two sets of direct and indirect threats to ICCAs, that each is being assessed for Talesh ICCA in table below.

	Threats	Assessment of threats in Talesh ICCA
Direct	Inequalities between economic and social classes and gender groups	Women in Talesh have been more independent than other parts of the country. They have been actively involved in everyday activities of tribe such as livestock rearing and dairy production, and been usually consulted in decision makings.
	Changing values	Out migrations is the case in the ICCA as many other parts of the country. At the time, youth prefer residing in cities like Rasht and Astara. This threaten Indigenous Knowledge and practices, language and traditional governance.
	Population growth	The overall Talesh population has grown compared to the past. While the surplus have migrated out, the number of households have

	Threats	Assessment of threats in Talesh ICCA
		increased which in turn imposed more pressure on pastures.
Indirect	Lack of or inappropriate recognition	Although there is mostly no official recognition of ICCAs in Iran, new policy changes seem to be on the way. Notwithstanding, Talesh and some other tribal communities in the country have been striving for local and international recognition.
	Weak or inadequate legal tenure or rights	Since the 1963 Nationalization of natural resources, the rangelands are owned by public and custodianship is through the government. However, the government have reassigned some limited access and management rights to the nomadic people through grazing license. However, in Talesh territory many important migration routes have been confiscated for urban, industrial and agricultural development.
	Development and resource exploitation processes	Development of dams and agriculture complexes, grabbing pasturelands by government or peasants are among major threats to the ICCA. Development several dams is an example of serious threat to livelihoods and environmental rights of Talesh people.
	Increasing pressure on resources	Today, number of households have increased in Talesh territories which in turn impose more pressure on pastures.
	Encroachment on the ICCA	Urban development have been threatening the migration routes and hence the mobility of Talesh herders which is crucial for sustaining nomadic pastoral way of livelihoods.
	Inappropriate forms of recognition	Seems not to be the case in Iran
	Inappropriate and active acculturation of communities	Education programs in Iran have been based on universal schooling systems and unappropriated for nomadic lifestyle. The universal education system is claimed to be in line with sedentarisation policies. Tribal indigenous knowledge and skills were not considered in this approach to education.

6. Governance quality (“good governance”)

IUCN’s broad principles for “good governance” of protected areas is a measure for assessing how certain principles and values relating governance of protected areas (including ICCAs) are adhered to. (Borrini-Feyerabend et al, 2013) Using “good governance” indicators, it is tried in this report to examine quality of governance among Talesh communities.

Principles	Assessments according to good governance indicators
Legitimacy and voice	<p>In many cases right holders do not get sufficient information or have a say in decision makings. Traditionally gender equity exists among Talesh tribes. Women engagement is stronger compared to other tribal territories of Iran. In some cases Talesh tribespeople have been granted special support from Cenesta or government authorities. However, there are still plenty of room for support for vulnerable groups. By promoting tribal CBOs and advocating recognition of ICCAs, Cenesta and tribal groups are trying to attribute the governance to the closest institutions to natural resources (subsidiarity).</p>
Direction	<p>Long term consistent strategic visions barely exist among Talesh tribespeople. However, establishment of CBOs in their territory can help in promotion of such strategic visions. Talesh tribal people and Cenesta have been advocating promotion of ICCAs. These ICCAs would be consistent with tribal agreed values and compatible with national and international obligations. Clear policy directions to set priorities for governance and conservation barely exist among Talesh tribespeople.</p>

	<p>There is definitely much room for favoring emergence champions in Talesh territory.</p>
Performance	<p>Through establishment of CBOs, Talesh people would be able to come up with strong mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of management effectiveness in governing their commons.</p> <p>Through establishment of UNINOMAD and UNICAMEL which are unions of nomadic peoples of Iran and that of camel herders respectively, a learning culture have been somewhat promoted. Yet more measures need to be taken.</p> <p>Although UNINOMAD and Cenesta have been active in advocacy campaigns, yet direct engagement of tribal CBOs is of crucial importance.</p>
Accountability	<p>Compared to other tribal territories and areas in Iran which have suffered annihilation of their social structure in Talesh territories, old orders and Well-defined roles and responsibilities is still in place. This could be an asset that would help a great deal in improving function of their future CBOs.</p> <p>Appropriate means of rewards and sanctions for evaluation of performance barely exist as there is no established CBO to design and regulate these activities.</p> <p>By launching UNINOMAD website as a communication avenue, Talesh tribespeople would be able to present their reports on performance and conservation measures.</p>
Fairness of rights	<p>There has been serious efforts by Cenesta to help Talesh tribespeople establish CBOs and design livelihood and conservation plans that would consider equitable sharing of the costs and benefits among right holders.</p> <p>Most official protected areas in Gilan Province have been part of Talesh territories to which their livelihood has been depended. So far no compensation has been made to Talesh people.</p> <p>Talesh tribespeople are banned from access to official protected areas formerly belonged to them. Even today their decency and dignity is questioned by authorities, accusing them of being threat to biodiversity and wildlife.</p> <p>Law and regulation relating nomadic people have been partial, inconsistent and discriminative e.g. nationalisation of rangelands and sedentarisation policies.</p> <p>Talesh tribespeople, through UNINOMAD, are striving for respecting the rights of indigenous people through advocacy and action for recognition of ICCAs in Iran.</p> <p>The concept of FPIC is being tried to be taken seriously into account for all activities carried out in tribal territories. Talesh tribespeople should set strict terms and conditions for external actors who would be interested in carrying out research or mining activities in their ICCA.</p>

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