

Support for Governance of Protected and Conserved Areas in Iran

Report No. 1



A wetland in the summering grounds of Qashqai indigenous nomadic tribes, Iran. The nomads have preserved this wetland and its international migratory birds for hundreds of years. It is the first ICCA to have been recognised formally by the Department of the Environment in Iran

Cenesta, Tehran, 25 May 2016

Meetings held so far

Since before the signing of our contract for the above project, Cenesta has organised and held a series of meetings with high officials of the Department of the Environment (DOE) and exchanges with Vice President Massoumeh Ebtekar in which we explained and discussed the initiatives planned with the IUCN. We have also had extensive interaction and contacts with the Forest, Rangeland and Watershed Management Organisation (FRWO), which has an important role to play in conservation of nature and natural resources. Like it happened in other countries, all natural resources in Iran (forests, rangelands and watersheds) were nationalised at an early moment in national history. For our country it happened in 1963, under the ex-Shah, and has continued to be under *de jure* government control until now. They are, in fact, under the formal control of FRWO. Thus, the DOE has authority over officially designated protected areas (amounting to some 10% of the country), but FRWO has legal custody over all remaining natural resources of the country (rangelands 52% and forests: 8.8%).

Besides our extensive meetings with DOE, we have held meetings with the Director of FRWO, which were both preceded and followed by meetings with the Senior Deputy Director of FRWO and members of the High Council of Natural Resources, discussing the possibility of including the lands and resources conserved by FRWO as part of the country's international obligations towards Aichi Target 11. The cooperation with the FRWO is vital for the appropriate recognition of ICCAs domestically and is critical for achieving Aichi Target 11 because, as mentioned, the majority of ICCA territories in Iran are under the *de jure* authority of this organisation, although indigenous peoples and local communities have *de facto* authority over their territories in addition to *de jure* use rights through grazing permits or rights in approved "rangeland management projects" and/or "forest management projects". Cenesta is currently estimating the approximate coverage of ICCAs within the country, but the analysis of information is not yet complete.

Table 1. Extension of forest, rangeland and protected areas

Cover type	Area (has)	Coverage (%)
Total country	164,800,000	100
Forest areas	14,319,063	8.8
Rangeland areas	84,814,991	52
Protected Areas	16,480,000	10
ICCA Coverage (working estimate , excluding marine and coastal areas)		25

Significantly, we have also had meetings with the Ministry of Petroleum, which has been working with Cenesta for defining Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities appropriate for Iran's needs. Cenesta and this Ministry have just concluded an international Conference on CSR in which conserving nature, preventing environmental pollution and promoting the role of indigenous peoples and local and traditional communities were among the commitments that emerged from the Conference. The Ministry of Petroleum has expressed its commitment to these and to actively supporting the conservation of nature. Cenesta will invite this Ministry and other relevant stakeholders as participants and potential partners in the IUCN workshops and the governance assessment processes. The Ministry of Petroleum has requested the help of Cenesta in assessing potential impact of oil and gas operations on living environments of indigenous peoples and other vulnerable communities.

We have also had extensive discussions with many indigenous peoples and local communities (IPs/LCs) and organisations representing them, who are our usual closest partners. The customary territories of many Iranian IPs/LCs are *bona-fide* ICCAs. We are closely working with many of them with the support of an important EU project. Iranian CSOs other than Cenesta, such as UNINOMAD, UNICAMEL, Integrity of Life, Women for Sustainable Development, Iranian Cheetah Society, and

Children of Water are to be included in the governance assessment events under preparation and we have discussed the events with them in a preliminary way.

Agreements

Overall, our meetings made us progress well, and we have reached important agreements, including the following:

1. Renewed and strengthened commitment to positively respond to IUCN guidelines and international obligations

DOE has strengthened and specified its agreement to collaborate with Cenesta towards a positive response to IUCN technical guidance and the fulfilment of CBD international obligations regarding:

- Enhanced **diversity of governance of protected areas**, as expressed in the “**IUCN Matrix of Protected Areas**”;
- CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas (**POWPA**) and in particular its Element 2 regarding Governance, participation, equity and benefit sharing;
- CBD Aichi Targets (in particular Target 11 regarding **expansion of coverage** of protected and conserved areas and Target 18 and 14, stressing the **traditional knowledge, innovations and practices** of indigenous peoples and local communities and the **restoration of the ecosystems** that support their livelihoods and health) and the quality of governance of PAs;
- Participatory elaboration of the **National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP-II)** to include issues regarding **governance diversity, quality and vitality**. **DOE and FRWO have agreed that Cenesta will lead the process for the preparation of NBSAP-II**;
- The Research Institute of Forests and Rangelands (RIFR), independent yet affiliated with FRWO, has also expressed interest in collaborating towards the international commitments in a number of ways. This includes the **identification of special biological diversity zones** that need conservation. The latter can be achieved collaboratively through either ICCAs or co-managed areas. They have also agreed to collaborate with Cenesta and UNINOMAD for the establishment of the **National Tribal Herbarium** as a part of their existing important and internationally valued collection.

All of the above are manifestations of national policies already expressed by , the Vice President of the Republic and Director of DOE in her letter of 7 February 2015 to the Director General of IUCN outlining Iran’s commitment to meeting its international obligations as follows (please see Annex 1):

- Meeting the 20 strategic goals of Aichi by 2020, including Goal 11 on the expansion of Iran’s protected areas including through “other effective area-based conservation measures”;
- Making Iran’s protected and conserved areas compatible with the IUCN Matrix of PAs as approved by the World Conservation Congress of Jeju in 2012, including through appropriate recognition of ICCAs;
- Realising the Programme of Work on Protected Areas (POWPA) of the CBD;
- Preparing our revised NBSAP-II under CBD.

2. Commitment to establishing a multi-stakeholder national learning network on governance of protected areas

- At least 30 existing government-run protected areas (a minimum of one per each of the 30 provinces) belonging to our Iranian management category 2 (wildlife refuges) and 4 (“conserved areas”) will be considered pilot initiatives towards shared governance or community-governance arrangements.
- These pilot protected areas will be pulled together into a “national learning network” to provide mutual support and share experiences in learning-by-doing with the facilitation and technical accompaniment of Cenesta. Cenesta has expressed its readiness to facilitate the establishment of start-up teams, support participatory socio-ecological reviews and set up the operational

networks of pilot initiatives. Lessons learnt from IUCN-CEESP projects from 1998 to 2008 will be used to design a system based on economy of scale in dealing with a large number of pilot areas.

- In turn, lessons learnt from pilot initiatives and mutual learning will be distilled and consolidated into specific recommendations for policy and practice.
- On the basis of such recommendations, a horizontal and vertical expansion programme is envisaged. We expect to accompany a gradual transformation of the governance of individual protected areas as well as the governance of the overall national system. As part of that, a fair degree of authority and responsibility should be devolved to local communities and other entities living within or in the surroundings of the protected areas. The overall policies and practices of conservation in the country are expected to be influenced in a significant way.
- The above-mentioned 30+ pilot initiatives and the ongoing experiences with ICCAs, the participatory elaboration of the NBSAP-II and momentum towards the Aichi targets will all contribute to the establishment of a multi-stakeholder national learning network. The very relations that are being created among stakeholders such as government agencies, CSOs and right-holders such as IPs/LCs are in fact leading to completely new relations and experiences of mutual learning that have not existed before.

3. Commitment to technical support and co-financing

The DOE has allocated a modest amount of money in support of the IUCN workshops through a contract with Cenesta (a first instalment of approximately US\$4000 has been paid) and the FRWO has committed to participating and contributing technically to the events and the ongoing process. This commitment is expected to continue all the way to the 2020 deadline in pursuit of Aichi Targets. The FRWO is preparing maps and descriptions of areas declared as “conserved” and are committed to the appropriate recognition of ICCAs that fall outside the four official PA categories of DOE. As part of this, FRWO recognises secure rights of access and tenure of natural resources in the “nationalised lands and natural resources” in pasture and transhumance corridors in accordance with customary rights of indigenous nomadic tribes of Iran as well as in peripheral rangelands/forests around sedentary villages. This is done primarily through grazing permits and approved “rangeland” and “forest” management initiatives.

To secure strength and continuity for the IUCN-Cenesta initiative, we have also stressed governance issues and innovation in the context of conservation policy reform in an EC project in the process of implementation by Cenesta 2015-2017 (“Social, Environmental and Livelihood Justice for Poverty Elimination for Iranian Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities”). In this light, we are considering the budget of our current IUCN-Cenesta contract and of the EC project as co-financing for each other. The IUCN project will contribute to the specific objectives of the EC project and vice-versa. The budget of the EC project is unable to pay for activities such as the IUCN workshops. However, we can charge some personnel expenses to the EC project. Full accounting of this co-financing will be provided both to the EC as well as the IUCN. Care has been taken to avoid any duplication or redundancy of activities between the EC and IUCN related activities. The EC project is allowing Cenesta to pursue extensive work with IPs/LCs and engage them with continuity and in a capillary way as it is crucial to do in all initiatives dealing with IPs/LCs.

Cenesta has carried out a previous EC project “Empowering Iran’s Indigenous Nomadic Tribes: towards Poverty Eradication and Nature Conservation through Diversification of Income and Wealth Generation Activities and the Promotion of Indigenous & Community Conserved Areas (2012-2015)”. Throughout this project Cenesta worked towards the recognition and registration of ICCAs in the WCMC. This has been the first-ever EC project dedicated specifically to ICCAs—to our knowledge—in any country. The current project started in 2015 and includes Objective 2 on “[Rehabilitating] the natural resources within the traditional territories of indigenous peoples and local communities”. Cenesta is using EC resources under this objective to add value and complement the budget of the IUCN project by supporting the personnel working for it.

4. Commitment to run two major workshops in July 2016 on Governance of Protected Areas in Iran and on Governance of Transboundary Protected Areas with neighbouring countries

DOE, FRWO and other partners have agreed to co-organise with Cenesta two major workshops. The dates proposed for the two workshops are 24-31 July 2016. **We would like to ask for the kind confirmation of attendance by Trevor and James.** The preliminary descriptions of the two workshops are summarised here:

National workshop on governance of protected and conserved areas in Iran

Objectives

1. Review and discussion of international guidance and policies regarding governance of protected and conserved areas;
2. Review and discussion of relevant experiences (including experience with environmental, economic and governance assessment by indigenous peoples in their own territories), lessons learned and existing commitments in Iran;
3. Presentation of exercises using the IUCN governance analysis, assessment and planning methodology for the country with references to specific regions and governance types in Iran;
4. Drawing of conclusions and commitments for protected and conserved areas in Iran.

Duration and venue

The workshop will last 3 days and will include a field visit to an ICCA.

Transboundary Conservation Workshop

This event will gather representatives from 7 terrestrial neighbouring countries of Iran (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey & Iraq) and selected marine neighbours (to be considered: Oman, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Russia and Kazakhstan). From each country representatives of 3 major stakeholder groups will be invited: government, CSO, IP/LC, although not all three types are expected to succeed in attending from every countries.

Objectives

- To share IUCN technical guidance and various experiences on suitable approaches to meet international commitments (such as Aichi Targets, POWPA and NBSAP-II implementation and reports);
- To increase awareness and commitment towards transboundary conservation among the countries of the region;
- To identify transboundary protected and conserved areas where collaboration and governance work could be nurtured and supported.

Duration and venue

- The workshop will last 3 days and will take place on the Iranian side of a region where transboundary protected and conserved areas could flourish. A field visit and cultural event will be organised.