

Evaluation Abstract

Title, author and date of the evaluation report:

North Africa Biodiversity Programme, Phase III: Internal Review, prepared by Meg Gawler, June 2003

Name of project, programme or organizational unit:

North Africa Biodiversity Programme, Phase III

Objectives of the project, programme or mandate of the organizational unit:

1. To promote the conservation of endangered and economically useful plants in North Africa, with special reference to medicinal and economically useful plants.
2. To promote indigenous knowledge and the equitable participation of people in the management and conservation of endangered and economically useful plants in North Africa.

IUCN area of specialisation: Biodiversity

Geographical area: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, WESCANA Region

Project or programme duration, length of existence of organisational unit:

November 2001 – October 2004

Overall budget of the project, programme or organizational unit: CHF 1,910,000

Donor(s): Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Objectives of the evaluation:

The internal review aimed to examine the: (1) project design; (2) expectations and perceptions of IUCN, partners, SDC; (3) feasibility of continuing the project for the remainder of Phase III – including capacity of the implementers, opportunities for refocusing the project, and synergies with the IUCN Mediterranean Programme; (4) management from IUCN Headquarters; (5) factors supporting effective delivery, and (6) provide recommendations to guide the remainder of Phase III.

Type of evaluation: Mid-Term Project Evaluation; Internal

Period covered by the evaluation: November 2001 – April 2003

Commissioned by: IUCN and SDC

Audience: IUCN and SDC

Evaluation team: External

Methodology used:

The evaluation methodology included scoping interviews, document review, site visits to the implementing organisations and the project areas, in-depth interviews, group discussions, and a debriefing and feedback session at IUCN Headquarters. The review mission visited all five countries over a period of 24 days, and met with a total of 116 respondents from different respondent groups (project team, IUCN staff, national and regional partners and IUCN Members, Swiss embassies and SDC, and project beneficiaries).

Questions of the evaluation:

An evaluation matrix was developed for the purposes of the evaluation, defining the main issues and listing key questions, sub-questions, and corresponding data sources. The key questions were as follows:

1. Are there design problems?
2. How effective has the project been to date?
3. Is the project delivering according to schedule?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of project management and coordination?
5. How effective are internal and external communication?
6. How to move forward in the remainder of Phase III?

Findings:

- The project design is essentially sound, relevant, and realistic. However, it is not clear how the various activities contribute to the achievement of an overall goal.
- The project is very relevant to the needs of IUCN Members and partners in the region, and provides an opportunity to learn about the relationships between conservation and development. It also provides an opportunity for Members to develop a collective voice with respect to biodiversity and the implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The theme of medicinal plants is well chosen, as it provides a good entry point for biodiversity conservation in general. Medicinal plants are important for the people of North Africa, especially in rural areas.
- The project in Algeria has many achievements to its credit: pilot projects have been set up on three women-run farms to cultivate relatively large quantities of medicinal plants; active work at the Batna field station on the experimental nursery, seed bank, specimen collection and production of environmental education materials; experiments on reproducing medicinal plants are also being carried out at the botanical garden in Algiers; according to the Compendium Editor, very good monographs have been contributed to the Compendium.
- In Egypt, the project is essentially based on ex situ conservation of medicinal plants. A Centre for Conservation of Endangered Plants has been built, and a garden is underway to grow threatened and endangered plants. Four Bedouin micro-nurseries produce hard-to-find plants for the garden, and the traditional knowledge of the Bedouin is being gathered and documented. The project is also supporting phytochemical research, investigations on the status of medicinal plants in the project area near El Hammam, and according to the Editor, good contributions have been made to the Compendium.
- Progress has been solid, but slow in Libya. Researchers and students are gathering traditional knowledge, especially from women. Seed collection and reproduction trials of endangered plants are ongoing at two experimental stations near Abu-Ghailan NP. Other work includes: gathering field data on endangered plants, herbarium specimens, experiments in phytochemistry, and environmental education. Monographs for the Compendium are behind schedule, and no contribution has been made to the Gender Newsletter. IUCN provided training in January 2002 to EGA staff to develop a regional medicinal plants database, but there has not been much follow-up so far.
- Excellent progress is being made in Morocco in a project that is closely linked to plant conservation in one of Morocco's most prestigious protected areas, Toubkal NP: determination of threatened and endangered medicinal and aromatic plant species in the park; collection and documentation of traditional knowledge; analysis of the active ingredients in medicinal plants; experiments to determine anti-microbial activities of medicinal plants from the park; promotion of ecotourism; afforestation in the buffer zone with 10'000 carob trees; community cultivation of iris as a source of additional revenue; awareness-raising; many publications produced, and according to the Editor very good monographs contributed to the Compendium.

- The project in Tunisia is operating according to a different workplan than the one in the agreed project document. In relation to the activity framework of the project document – i.e., the project’s contractual obligations – to date no progress has yet been made in Tunisia with respect to medicinal plants in Phase III. The observations made by the review from a brief visit to the project site of Phase II call into question whether there were lasting results from Phase II in Tunisia in terms of the conservation of medicinal plants. According to the Compendium Editor, contributions to the Compendium from the expert in Tunisia have not been adequate.
- At the level of the regional coordination, results include: training workshop organised in participatory approaches and gender; Committee of Experts and Gender Network set up; Gender Newsletter drafted. There have also been disappointments with regard to the regional coordination, for example: the lack of progress in disseminating and sharing knowledge; no visible progress on the project web site; delays in producing monographs for the Compendium, and inadequate monitoring of progress in the national and regional projects. There are multiple reasons for this, and a number of operational recommendations to improve the regional coordination are given in Annex I.
- Largely because of the constraints of the very limited human resources in the regional programme at IUCN HQ, management and technical support has not met expectations.
- In Morocco and Libya, the project activities are closely linked with conserving medicinal plants in situ. In Algeria, Libya and Egypt, the project has made important advances in scientific and agronomic experiments to reproduce and cultivate wild medicinal plants. This is an essential pre-requisite for moving from wild harvests to the cultivation of medicinal plants by rural communities.
- The project approach to development seems to be lacking in sophistication – while tangible support is important, it is not the distribution of equipment alone (e.g., improved stoves) that will generate long-term sustainable development.
- Factors supporting effective conservation delivery are identified as follows: (1) a competent, motivated, multi-disciplinary team; (2) National Coordinators who understand the challenges, who are excellent managers, and who delegate with confidence to their teams; (3) integration of women into the project strategy; (4) a strategic approach to the identification of project area; (5) genuine presence at the field level; and (6) good contacts with people in the field and local authorities.
- Specific challenges to management and implementation include :
 - In Algeria, serious bureaucratic hurdles at the National Agency for Nature Conservation (ANN) have compromised project effectiveness;
 - In Egypt, implementation would benefit from a more multi-disciplinary team, including professionals in protected areas and land use management, and development and gender specialists.
 - To improve implementation in Libya, emphasis should be placed on communicating more and on delivering results on schedule.
 - In Morocco, there has been a blockage with the gender component, but this should be able to be resolved by mainstreaming gender into the core project activities.
 - In Tunisia, IUCN may wish to consider working with a different implementing organisation.
 - The regional coordination would benefit from more active technical and management support from IUCN.

Recommendations:

The review makes a number of strategic and operational recommendations. The top six priorities identified are as follows:

1. The North Africa Biodiversity Programme should be continued, and extended for an additional year to allow for the delays that have been encountered so far. IUCN HQ and the Regional Coordination will need to invest substantial efforts to accompany the implementation process, and take a more active role to ensure that results are achieved.
2. It is recommended that the regional meeting, planned for December 2002, be rescheduled for as soon as possible, so that the project can regain momentum.
3. Since in Tunisia there is a question whether the project, as presently implemented, will deliver satisfactory results, it is suggested that IUCN explore alternative implementation arrangements for the remainder of Phase III, such as developing a revised implementation plan with the Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Water Resources.
4. To avoid the administrative delays that are presently compromising the work in Algeria, immediate change of project management is proposed. The best solution is seen as addressing the project contract for the second year of Phase III to the present National Coordinator under the auspices of the Mouvement Ecologique Algérien.
5. In Morocco it is suggested that SPANA take responsibility for the entire budget, including gender; capacity exists in the project site to work effectively with women; however, this capacity needs to be strengthened to address gender issues in their wider, more strategic sense. Gender should be mainstreamed into the project activities, as has been done in Algeria.
6. IUCN should look for ways to follow up on the many opportunities that exist in North Africa to expand its membership, and to build the capacity of Members.

While the project is considered viable the way it is planned, rethinking its design is highlighted as an option, particularly in terms of investing greater efforts in promising areas and activities; documenting and distilling learning from the best practice in these areas to IUCN initiatives in South East Asia, Sri Lanka and East Africa; expanding the partner network; using resources that may be freed up from focusing the project on select activities, etc.

Lessons Learned: Not specified

Language of the evaluation: English

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