



*This MENARID project is a knowledge sharing and learning partnership for improved natural resource management, with Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Yemen, Jordan, and Iran.*

## ENCOURAGING LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO CONSERVE THEIR NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS (TUNISIA)

Empowering people to become guardians of their natural environments has the potential to promote conservation, strengthen ecosystem services, and raise rural incomes

An initiative focused on conservation efforts in three Tunisian nature parks is incorporating conservation and ecosystem services into regional economic development plans. These efforts are strengthening links with local communities who increasingly recognize the importance of sustainability and the potential economic impacts of a healthy natural resource base.



Bouhedma National Park, Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia

*Source: "pictures from project managers"*

### Points to Consider

- **Community consultation:** include local communities in economic development plans, empowering them to become guardians of their natural environments, and providing them with an opportunity to devise strategies to shape their future and the future of younger generations.
- **Institutionalization:** Encourage local members of the community to form associations that can act as a liaison with government, charging these groups with the responsibility of raising awareness about conservation issues and protecting ecosystem services.
- **Sustainable management:** The local economy can only grow on a sustainable basis if local communities are committed to conservation and work together to eradicate damaging practices.

### Purpose

This briefing describes preliminary work on a conservation project that is strengthening links with local communities and incorporating ecosystem services into regional economic development plans. It is aimed at policymakers, donors, and other potential partners and supporters.

### Suitability

This intervention is suited to areas where there is potential for eco-system systems to contribute to economic development.

### The project in numbers

- Number of beneficiaries: 4000
- Investment: 10,000 EU
- Number of parks targeted: 3
- Community groups: 5

### Partners

- FEM
- BM
- Ministère de l'Agriculture,
- Ministère de l'Education Nationale,
- Ministère de la Recherche Scientifique,
- Ministère des Affaires Sociales
- NGOs

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This project's initial efforts are targeting three of Tunisia's national parks - L'Ichkeul, Bouhedma, and Jbil – which have been chosen because they represent distinct ecosystems. Although these parks enjoy a degree of protection, many still suffer from the effects of mismanagement and unsustainable practices. Poaching, deforestation, and herding are all capable of causing irreparable damage to the ecosystems of these areas. They must also contend with the effects of climate change in a region which is experiencing increasing water scarcity and rising temperatures.

The first line of defense against ecosystem degradation are local communities: people living within or close to the parks are included in conservation efforts and empowered to become guardians of their natural resources. Consultations with these communities stress the importance of ecosystem services and the potential economic gains to be derived from their sustainable and appropriate management.

Subsequent natural resource management plans were produced in coordination with the local population. These outlined opportunities for micro-projects and enterprises that could be implemented on a sustainable basis with minimal adverse impacts on the environment. Potential activities included rehabilitation efforts, the production of honey, and eco-tourism.

This participatory approach also emphasizes a process of community institutionalization and the formation of groups charged with the respon-

sibility of managing natural resources and raising public awareness about conservation issues. These groups – termed environment clubs – also act as a liaison between government officials and bodies and the wider population.

The initial impacts of the initiative have been impressive. Approximately 4000 people have already been reached by the project in target areas and surveys suggest that community awareness about conservation and the need to protect the environment is increasing significantly. For example, 90 per cent of children surveyed in project areas in 2005 were considered 'weakly aware' of environmental issues. Yet two years later 91 per cent of children consulted were 'aware' or 'highly aware' of biodiversity topics.

There are plans for community responsibilities to evolve in the future so that environment clubs are able to participate in the management of parks and lead visitor tours. This greater role envisioned for local communities, and the socio-economic activities the nature parks are expected to sustain, are expected to be written into formal regulations.

