

B I O D I V E R S I T Y

D E S E R T I F I C A T I O N

# W E S C A N A

**Systemic Integration  
of Networks for  
Sustainable Freshwater  
Management in the  
West/Central Asia  
and North Africa Region**

➤ NETWORK  
OF NETWORKS

➤ TRANS-NATIONALITY

➤ WATER RESOURCES  
MANAGEMENT





## Background and rationale

Water stands out in a pivotal position as the nodal point of ecosystem fluxes, food chains and biotic and abiotic interactions both between and within air and soil medium. Freshwater bodies such as rivers, lakes and wetlands, provide habitat to a wide range of species and host a number of vital ecosystem services, including water purification and retention, flood control, nutrient recycling and restoration of soil fertility among others. Catchment areas and river basins play a critical role in the functioning of the Earth's ecosystems and have a significant role in economic and social terms as sources of water, food, hydropower and recreational amenities. As they often extend across one or more national boundaries, they are also transport and communication routes. Yet, planning and management of water resources use tend to be constrained within the bounds of sectoral perspectives and approaches. For a number of reasons, water resources and water quality, both core elements of development processes, tend to be dealt with by different specialised institutions and technical experts' forums. Furthermore, relevant institutional frameworks are generally too rigid and interactions and coordination among them are very

limited: present networks of water expertise often function in isolation, without benefiting from the collective intelligence of connected networks. At the same time, water resources allocation schemes are hardly developed and/or assessed and monitored against their role in the maintenance of environmental flows. Other problems in the management of water resources include the limited access to technology, information and networks, incoherent and uncoordinated decision-making leading to cost inefficiency and further conflicts between planning and management practices, as well as a general lack of awareness on the consequences of indiscriminate water use. In the absence of economic incentives, water pricing mechanisms and unambiguous water allocation rules, the demand for water is steadily increasing. Therefore, the sustainable use of freshwater resources can be effectively assured only through an integrated, systemic and ecosystem-based management approach, which cuts across social, economic and ecological aspects at administrative and policy levels. This is of particular concern in countries such as those belonging to the West/Central Asia and North Africa (WESCANA) Region, which are characterised by arid and semi-arid climate and environmental conditions. In this wide Region, a highly specialised and drought-

resistant flora and fauna have developed over time and represent a distinctive part of the global biodiversity and gene pool. WESCANA countries also share many common traits with respect to culture, religion and tradition, as well as a unique geopolitical context. Many of the available water resources in the Region are shared by more than one country. The prevailing water scarcity and drought conditions, which have inevitably a strong impact on the socio-economic features of the region, are at the root of a tremendous asset of traditional knowledge and customs, developed over time and relevant to sustainable water use. However, sustainable water management in the Region demands urgent attention and is a priority for WESCANA countries, which at the Amman Congress in 2000, agreed on the establishment of a Regional Water Programme Centre (RWPC) in Jordan. The Italian Cooperation has been actively engaged in programmes and projects aimed at influencing policies and practices towards integrated and sustainable freshwater use in the WESCANA countries. Indeed, Italy is playing a leading role at the regional level and in a number of initiatives, including the Euro Mediterranean Plan of Action for Water Resources, the support to debt swaps in irrigation and water supply schemes and the National Environmental Action Plans in several countries. The present initiative with the Government of Jordan and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) WESCANA Programme is also in line with the Italian Cooperation geographical priorities, which include the countries from Eastern and Southern Mediterranean



sea and the Middle East. On the other hand, the IUCN-WESCANA Programme tackles priority areas of natural resources management such as water, biodiversity, desertification, marine and coastal ecosystems, protected areas, environmental law, environmental education and communication, equity and sustainability. Within this framework, it has the potential to act as a catalyst for the integration of thematic networks and the development of an effective “network of networks”, and to promote an integrated and systemic approach for freshwater management. The first phase of the Water Programme is funded by the Italian Cooperation through its Core Fund Agreement with IUCN. Building upon the experience gained until now, a new project is under formulation as a Type-Two Partnership. Funds amount to 2,2 million euros. Jordan will be the focal point for the twenty-three other WESCANA States and IUCN will be entrusted with Programme execution and implementation.

## Goal, objectives and expected outputs

The long-term development goal of the WESCANA Water Programme is ‘to promote and consolidate a sustainable water management process in the WESCANA region, by tackling social, economic and ecological processes in target catchment areas and aquifers.

### The specific objectives of the Programme are the following.

- Promote a systemic approach for water management at policy and decision-making and field levels, with particular emphasis on the integration of water resources and water quality.
- Facilitate the dissemination and exchange of accurate and relevant information on ecosystem-based and integrated water management, through the consolidation of the Regional Water Programme Centre (RWPC) in Jordan and the creation of a network of networks among centres of excellence.
- Document best and bad practices in freshwater management.



- Support institutional capacity building in water planning and management, and boost the sustainability and effectiveness of the Programme's partners as providers of services, with the support of the RWPC in Jordan.
- Consolidate existing networks and promote new regional networks and partnerships on sustainable water management expertise and initiatives, including exploring linkages with all relevant institutions and initiatives.
- Establish support mechanisms aimed at strengthening institutional decision-making capacity, in order to ensure system planning and management at national and regional levels, and to build upon shared development potentials and constraints in the context of regional watersheds and groundwater basins.
- Develop and support the application of economic incentive mechanisms to reduce indiscriminate water consumption and promote the sustainable management of water demand.

### The expected results are as follows.

- The Regional Water Programme Centre in Jordan is consolidated as a focal point for the regional network of networks on





sustainable water management and is able to provide services to WESCANA partner countries.

- The capacity of network partners is strengthened in order to improve the respective national systemic planning and management and to serve other partner countries, with the support of the RWPC and through the provision of access to on-line information, training and monitoring.
- Institutional set-up and legislative frameworks are analysed and synthesised as the basis for the development of sustainable water management policy in WESCANA countries.
- Techniques for water conservation and sustainable use are assessed, classified and analysed within a framework for sustainable, integrated water management.
- A number of pilot planning and management actions are implemented jointly by two or more partner countries, and focus on water-related trans-boundary and regional management problems and/or development potentials.

## Implementation and results

The Programme is implemented according to the guiding principles of the WESCANA Regional Programme Framework. These include the development of regional collaboration, the engagement of the civil society and the full involvement of IUCN-WESCANA members. During the first phase, the RWPC in Jordan has been established, a network of water experts has been set-up and the Plan of Action for the regional programme has been defined.

### The next phase will include the following components and activities.

- Consolidation of the Regional Water Programme Centre in Jordan: the Centre will be consolidated by facilitating and strengthening the network of regional experts. New networks and partnerships will be started and policy guidelines established. Further, capacity building initiatives will be developed and implemented towards integrated and systemic water management.



- Situational analysis of best and bad practices in water management: an inventory will be established, classifying past and present water conservation and use practices and techniques, and relevant institutional, policy and legislative frameworks in the region. A subsequent gap analysis will identify priority actions for the definition of an integrated, systemic water management approach, the strengthening of existing and the development of new partnerships. This process will be supported through the implementation of modules for interdisciplinary capacity building aimed at integrated water management.

- Implementation of pilot planning and management action: two or more partner countries, in coordination with the RWPC in Jordan, will implement a number of pilot actions on systemic water planning and management. These will stem from a strong network of networks of centres of excellence and will focus on issues of national, trans-boundary and/or regional interest and impact in specific shared catchment areas and/or groundwater basins.

