

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

EIECP

Support Programme to the National Environmental Action Plan: Gabal Elba Protected Area Egypt

- › COLLABORATIVE
MANAGEMENT
- › CULTURAL
HERITAGE
- › ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT
- › ECO-TOURISM
- › ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITY
- › TRANS-BOUNDARY
ECOSYSTEM





Background and rationale

This Project is part and parcel of the wider Egyptian-Italian Environmental Program, referred to as the Egyptian-Italian Environmental Cooperation Program (EIECP), which is being carried out within the framework of donor initiatives aimed at assisting the Country in the implementation of its National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP). The national institution responsible for the whole Programme is the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) under the Ministry of Environment. The first Programme phase, which will be completed by the beginning of 2003, includes five components. The second phase is under final formulation and will start in 2003. The Programme will then expand to nine components, among which the present Gabal Elba Protected Area Project.

The Elba Protected Area covers about 36,600 sq km in Egypt's Red Sea Governorate on the border with the Sudan. The Area stretches from the coral reefs and islands of the Red Sea westwards into the Eastern desert. Elba is a "biodiversity hotspot" supporting a biological diversity unparalleled to any other terrestrial environment in Egypt. More than 450 plants have been recorded, representing a quarter of Egypt's plant species. The vertebrate fauna is the most diverse in the Country: the



only Egypt's population of Barbary sheep lives here, and leopard is reported to still live in the mountains. The coastal mangroves are the most extensive in the Country and globally threatened sea turtles and seabirds breed in the islands and coral reefs of the Red Sea.

The region is renowned for its beauty, with a rugged landscape and the seacoast nearby. It is also rich in ancient remains and prehistoric sites. Three ethnic groups live within the Area: the Bisharia, the Ababda and the Rashayda. The semi-nomadic Bisharia live in the Southern section of Elba, with their traditional territory stretching into the Sudan and Eritrea. The Ababda live predominantly in the Northern section of Elba. Like the Bisharia they are semi-nomadic, and follow a seasonal pattern of movement. Both groups depend mostly on livestock and charcoal production for their livelihoods. There is also limited trade in natural products such as honey, medicinal plants and handicrafts.

The third group, the Rashayda, are not indigenous to the region. They were expelled from Saudi Arabia in the 19th century and settled along the Red Sea coast of Egypt, the Sudan and Eritrea. The Rashayda play a pivotal role in trade between Egypt and the Sudan and are more affluent than the other groups. With the expansion of trade and development, many Egyptians have also migrated to the region, mainly to the coastal settlements.

The Halaib, also known as the Sudanese Administration Zone, is included in the the Protected Area. This Zone is disputed between Egypt and the Sudan and has been under Egyptian administration since mid 1990s. Elba shares the same ecosystem as Wadi Allaqi Protected Area in the Sudan and the territories of the Bisharia and Ababda ethnic groups straddle the border between the two countries. Since the 1980s, Egypt has developed the infrastructure of the Halaib, aiming to



fully integrate the Zone into the national economy. This is at the root of the recent development initiatives, particularly along the coast. Plans have been designed for tourism, land reclamation, road construction and mining.

Over the last decade there has been extensive tourism development further North along the Red Sea coast. Although there are currently very few visitors to Elba because of restrictions, it is expected that tourism development will begin as soon as the institutional status of the Zone is settled. However, if large-scale tourism were to take place in the Gabal Elba it would be highly detrimental to this relatively untouched wilderness. Uncontrolled development may also exert negative pressures on local communities, by affecting both traditional culture and traditional patterns of natural resources use.



Indeed, the latter have been effective until very recently. For example, the Bisharia used to produce charcoal from dead Acacia trees, as tribal law forbids the cutting of live trees. However, the growing demand for charcoal in the Nile Valley and the increased financial needs of the local population weaken age-old and sustainable regulatory systems. The felling of trees, combined with increased grazing pressure, will reduce the vegetation cover and increase the aridity of the region. The Government is attempting to improve the social conditions of the local communities.



Social programmes are underway which aim to settle the semi-nomadic peoples, among the poorest in Egypt. While social services are provided to coastal communities, those in inner, less accessible zones, are in need of basic services, particularly health care. After five years of drought, there is an acute shortage of water and food. Malnutrition is common and starvation has been reported. These communities are increasingly dependent on Government assistance and many have migrated from the desert to the coastal settlements, in search of a better standard of life. Unemployment is high. There are few opportunities for income generation other than herding and charcoal production. Therefore, in addition to the provision of basic social services, local communities need capacity building, employment, alternative sources of income and a stronger role in decision-making processes. The region's wildlife is also threatened from this fast development, mainly by hunting which has decimated the gazelle population and larger bird species, such as ostriches and birds of prey. Increased activity in the coastal area by development, military and hunters has pushed wildlife further inland to less favourable habitats. The Nature Conservation Sector (NCS) of EEAA has built premises and is involved in the Area management. However, insufficient staff and resources have limited NCS activities to the coastal area, where its main task is to reduce the impact of tourism. Mangroves, for example, have received little attention, as is the case for the inner areas. Indeed, both infrastructures and personnel need adequate strengthening to

Local leather and textile handicraft product

achieve significant results. Under these environmental and socio-economic circumstances, it is recognised that traditional communities cannot be expected to limit their use of natural resources unless alternative sources of income are available. By supporting the development of the Elba Protected Area, this Project aims to improve the welfare of local people as well as to protect biodiversity and cultural heritage. Elba Protected Area has the potential to be a first class park, attracting high quality eco-tourism and generating vital revenue for the region and its population. The Protected Area offers the best means for the local people to conserve their natural resources and preserve their unique culture and way of life. Except for hunting, the Project will not restrict natural resources use: it will collect information on how and where resources are being used, and will recommend appropriate mitigation measures. Given the unclear institutional status of the Zone, there have been few donor initiatives in Elba. However, it is expected that once the Project will be operational, there will be greater national and international interest in the area. The Project will also initiate discussions on the establishment of a trans-boundary Protected Area with the Sudan. This initiative could potentially lead to greater cooperation between Egypt and the Sudan and ultimately ease tensions on this disputed region. The Gabal Elba Protected Area project will be executed and implemented by the Nature Conservation Sector of EEAA, with the support of the World Conservation Unit (IUCN).



Goal, objectives and expected outputs

The overall development goal of the second phase of EIECP is to contribute to the protection of Egypt's natural and cultural resources, through strengthening EEAA's capacities in planning and management of environmentally sustainable development.

The specific objectives of the Programme are as follows.

- Consolidate results achieved in the first phase of the Programme and ensure the sustainability of all activities undertaken in each project.
- Expand the Programme to include new priority fields of interest for the Ministry of Environmental Affairs/EEAA, which are consistent with the general objectives of the Italian Cooperation.
- Build upon the experience acquired during the first phase to develop new projects.

In particular, the development objective of the Gabal Elba Protected Area Project is to strengthen the Protected Area Management Unit (PAMU) capacity, raise funds to support park management activities and explore the development of a trans-boundary conservation area with the Sudan.

Specific objectives will be the following.

- Prepare the first Management Plan for the Protected Area.
- Strengthen the PAMU's management capacity through the provision of technical assistance, staff and equipment.
- Prepare an investment plan for Elba, aimed at attracting development funds for the Protected Area.



- Identify possible sources of funding for implementing the management plan.
- Gather existing scientific data on Elba and collect additional data necessary for the development of the management and investment plans.
- Develop an environmental awareness programme and initiate development projects based on local natural resources.
- Conclude collaborative agreements with key agencies operating in the Protected Area.
- Prepare an action plan for initiating cooperation with Wadi Allaqi Protected Area by holding discussions with the Sudan on protecting the trans-boundary ecosystem.



Implementation and results

The Elba Protected Area Project is due to start in January 2003 and to run for three years. Activities foreseen are described below.

- The Project will develop the management plan through a participatory process involving local stakeholders and communities. The Area will be zoned for different uses and degrees of protection in consultation with the local communities and according to the results of the assessment of the key biodiversity areas. Based on experience gained in the planning phase, the management plan will

define a framework for the involvement of key stakeholders in the collaborative management of the Area.

- The Project will train staff, especially rangers, in Environmental Impact Assessment, wildlife management, Protected Area management and monitoring. An exchange programme will be established to allow staff to gain experience in other Egyptian parks. Additional community guards will be recruited and control-research stations established to facilitate the enforcement of park regulations. Essential equipment such as four-wheel drive vehicles and short-wave radios will be provided and technical experts will establish a monitoring programme.
- Future needs and priorities will be identified and defined in a five-year investment plan. The Project will assist non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in developing project proposals. A national workshop will be held at the end of the Project with members of the donor community and senior Government officials to promote Elba Protected Area and mobilise funding support.
- Experts will collect the relevant data for the elaboration of the management and the investment plans. A monitoring programme for wildlife will also be put in place. A number of additional studies will be undertaken in key areas such as the cultural heritage sites, eco-tourism potential, waste management and traditional conservation systems and knowledge. The income generation potential of the Area will also be assessed and recommendations made to



generate revenue for the management of the park and for the local communities.

- Management and benefit-sharing agreements will be formulated with local communities and a number of demonstration projects established to alleviate poverty, particularly in outlying desert areas, through the sustainable use of natural resources. Funding will be provided for local NGOs, to take part in education and demonstration projects. A handicraft programme, based on similar experiences in other Egyptian National parks, will be established.
- Coordination mechanisms will be established with other social and environmental initiatives such as the USAID Red Sea Project and the FAO Mangrove Conservation Project. Protocols will be agreed between the EEAA and the Ministry of Health to provide health care to remote desert communities. The PAMU will identify areas where health-care is needed and organise visits with the local healthcare officials. EEAA will also cooperate with the Veterinary Affairs Department to provide services to remote communities.
- An action plan will be elaborated to start cooperation between Gabal Elba and Wadi Allaqi Protected Areas, and to pursue dialogue with the Sudan on enhancing communication, coordination and cooperation between the two Areas.

