

# Achieving Conservation and Sustainable Livelihoods in Customary Territory of Nomadic Pastoralists



Brief description of four  
SGP Projects on [REDACTED]  
(Community Conserved Territories and Areas)



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## Background on ICCAs and SGP support to them

In nearly all parts of the world, the history of nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources is much older than government-managed protected areas. Yet their impressive achievements are often neglected or not recognised in official conservation systems.

**Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Territories and areas (ICCAs)** are natural and/or modified ecosystems containing significant biodiversity values, ecological services and cultural values, voluntarily conserved by indigenous peoples and local communities, both sedentary and mobile, through customary laws or other effective means<sup>1</sup>.

Iran, like many other countries, has innumerable ICCAs that are increasingly being understood, recognised and supported. The lack of such understanding in the past has meant that tribal communities have been facing many problems that threaten the ecological and social integrity of their territory-based ICCAs and livelihoods. In recent years, following the national and international efforts for the recognition of ICCAs and community rights, as well as the formation of tribal community organisations and their federations and unions—particularly the pioneering role played by the SGP— conservation *cum* livelihoods projects have brought about some hopeful results.

The livelihoods of Iranian tribal communities have always depended on the conservation of nature throughout their territories— including its preservation, sustainable use and restoration. In the decades since the Nationalization Decree of 1963 and the resulting encroachment into their territory and irreparable mistakes of externally imposed management, systems have tended to weaken and erode the customary governance of natural resources and indigenous knowledge. One direct result of this intrusion and lack of respect for traditional systems has been environmental degradation that has become a big challenge.

The Councils of Elders of some tribal communities have discussed the problems they are facing, and have empowered representatives to discuss solutions with CENESTA and the UNDP/ GEF/ SGP. Four proposals were prepared by the tribal units involved for two of the largest tribal confederacies of the country (Qashqai and Shahsevan tribal confederacies) and one independent tribe (Chodari) for the ecological restoration of their ICCAs, strengthening customary institutions for natural resource management and reclaiming good governance of their territories.

These projects were elaborated following the participatory training session on project writing co-sponsored by UNDP/GEF/SGP for indigenous nomadic tribes, which was held in conjunction with the Second Workshop on Community Biodiversity Registers/ Community Bio-cultural Diversity Protocols, held by Cenesta and SGP in Shibidzar, which is a part of the summering grounds of the Qashqai on 15 September 2010. Significantly, in addition to the four projects mentioned and described here, SGP in Iran has supported other ICCA projects. These are the four earlier SGP-supported projects in Iran:

1. An international study of ICCAs in four regions (North Africa, Oceania, South America and West Asia with special attention to Iran);
2. A project for transition through a severe drought region in the territory of the small tribal confederacy of Abolhassani—in the zone of influence of the Khar-Touran Biosphere Reserve— including learning to strategically integrate selected crops with

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<sup>1</sup> Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas: A Bold New Frontier for Conservation, Available at: <https://www.iucn.org/content/indigenous-and-community-conserved-areas-bold-new-frontier-conservation>

the seasonal cycles of transhumant pastoralism to reduce grazing pressure on natural rangelands. The project also includes community-managed micro-credit schemes to help households carry themselves through the drought;

3. A project in a part of the customary territory of Farrokhvand Tribe of the Bakhtiari Tribal Confederacy (Charlang Branch), with the aim of restoring the habitats of endangered wild plants of economic importance, including mountain celery, wild leeks and garlic and the attractive inverted tulips in Charmahal-Bakhtiari Province;
4. A project to support the first DOE-Declared wetland ICCA in the summering grounds of the Kuhi subtribe of the Qashqai Tribal Confederacy near Eqlid, Fars Province;

Following these experiences, and given the international priority of ICCAs for the global SGP network, three more projects were elaborated by nomadic pastoralist communities as mentioned above in further support to ICCAs in Iran.

## **PROJECT1: Restoration and Management of ICCAs through Biodiversity Conservation**

### *Taklé Tribe, Shahsevan Tribal Confederacy*

Taklé, one of the 32 tribes of the Shahsevan Tribal Confederacy in Azerbaijan and Ardebil region, covers a territory of about 12,000 hectares and extends from Mount Savalan as summering grounds to Moghan Plain as wintering grounds. The social structure of this tribal community includes 5 subtribes, 12 clans and 57 nomadic camps. Taklé has a re-habilitated Council of Elders that is registered in its own name together with the associated community sustainable livelihood and reinvestment fund.

Using the above-mentioned Decree, parts of the ancestral tribal territories in Iran have been re-allocated to outsiders and government or private projects such as road construction, urban extensions, private agriculture, military bases, refineries and factories. Even parts of the tribal migratory routes have been completely occupied making it nearly impossible for seasonal migration—and this in flagrant violation of one of the strictest legal prohibitions<sup>2</sup>. This has forced parts of the tribe to adopt mechanised transportation for their flocks in place of the much healthier migration on foot, and for their belongings in place of using the uniquely well-adapted endemic Bactrian camels.

On the other hand, erosion of the sense of belonging as a result of the Decree accelerates the degradation of nature and its resources. One specific consequence of this degradation of the environment took place 5 years ago when weakened rangeland management in the summering grounds unleashed disastrous floods which destroyed the main Ali Darvish riverbed and the rainbow trout which is the main native fish species. This fish was a main source of livelihood for the indigenous community, as well as for the brown bear endemic to the region.

According to these challenges, the project aimed to conserve and restore the Taklé ICCA and improve sustainable livelihoods in their ancestral territory. The specific objectives of the project were the restoration and rehabilitation of key elements of the ecosystem including rainbow trout, brown bear, Bactrian camel, as well as important endangered medicinal plants and rangeland species such as an indigenous variety of chamomile. In addition, a return to

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<sup>2</sup> There is a law approved by the Revolutionary Council which makes it *absolutely* forbidden to change land use and/or invade, occupy or reallocate in any form tribal migration routes (Naqizadeh, Didari & Farvar, 2012. Recognition and Support to ICCAs in Iran, in Ashish, *et al.*, ed., *Recognition of ICCAs in the World*, Montreal, CBD.

customary management practices, revival of traditional knowledge and their enforcement was an aim of the project intended to restore the balance of the ecosystems of the tribal territory so that endangered species could be restored and the risk of environmental disasters such as uncontrolled floods are averted.

### *A Brief on Project Activities*

In this project, the Taklé tribe decided to restore their territory and its habitats using traditional knowledge and customary management practices as follows:

- Customary management of water resources through pool construction in upland headsprings and along the river;
- Restoration of upland rangelands by sowing the endemic seeds of pasture plants
- Participatory protection of rangelands;
- Collecting infant trout from a nearby river and breeding pools to reintroduce the young rainbow trout to Ali-Darvish River;
- Restoration of brown bear given the renewed availability of the red spotted trout into the Ali Darvish River;
- Collection and classification of native plant cover in a tribal herbarium—first of its kind in the world;
- Development of customary-based ecotourism.

The extension of the conservation activities as defined and implemented by the local community enabled them to start the rehabilitation of upland rangelands by seeding native species and constructing small earth damns, as well as re-populating the river through a fish-breeding programme. Restoration and rehabilitation of key elements of the ecosystem are among the successful results of this project. The success of this project has raised community morale and further re-empowered the Taklé tribe who are continuing to conserve and restore their ICCA and improve opportunities for sustainable livelihoods in their customary lands.







Figure 1: Various activities carried out during SGP project in Taklé Subtribe, Shahsevan Tribal Confederacy.

## **PROJECT2: Planning and Implementing Community-Based Ecotourism by Focusing on Territorial Integrity**

### *Heybatlu Subtribe of Shish Bayli Tribe, Qashqai Tribal Confederacy*

Indigenous peoples and community conserved territories and areas (ICCA) include protected areas by indigenous communities, which have high biological, ecological, and cultural value. For centuries, these communities, through traditional knowledge and approaches, have played a prominent role in the conservation and sustainable usage of natural resources and the local environment. Recognising these protected areas and the role that communities play in conserving them not only reinforces local conservation efforts, it also supports the communities' livelihoods that depend highly on the sustainable usage of local natural resources. Projects such as community-based eco-tourism in which tourism activities are based on local ecological heritage and are managed by and financially support the local community reinforce the status of ICCAs and the right of local communities to thrive from their conservation efforts.

Nomads of the Heybatlu Subtribe from the Sish Bayli Tribe of the Qashqai Tribal Confederacy have maintained their nomadic lifestyle for centuries. The social structure within the Heybatlu is similar to that of other nomadic societies, including respect for tribal elders and sustaining customary management systems. Nomadic lifestyle and the rich biodiversity they preserve have been a subject of attraction for eco-tourism. The project implemented by the Sustainable Livelihood Fund of Heybatlu nomads with the support of the UNDP/GEF/SGP and the Centre for Sustainable Development (Cenesta) addressed

conservation efforts and sustainable livelihoods through the development of eco-tourism in the area. The project was grounded on indigenous knowledge and customary management of natural resources in order to develop potential revenue-generating activities for the indigenous communities to lessen financial burdens that are pressuring many tribal members to migrate to urban areas. This project was an attempt to introduce the concept of ICCAs in Iran and demonstrate the relationship between nomadic culture and customs and the sustainable usage of their environment and preservation of biodiversity to interested parties. Most importantly, it allowed the community to benefit from their work and develop a complementary livelihood that supports their traditions and intimacy with their environment.

The main objectives of the project were:

1. Establishment of a practical model of “community-based eco-tourism” in the territory of the Heybatlu subtribe nomads;
2. Enhanced awareness of various groups of society (internal and external) in the proper implementation of a community-based eco-tourism model that preserves environmental, economic, and cultural values;
3. Promotion of ICCA concept in the country and applying it to the territory of the Heybatlu subtribe;
4. Collection and classification of native plant cover in a tribal herbarium—first of its kind in the world;
5. Creation of complementary livelihoods and generation of revenue for tribal members;
6. Empowerment of tribal communities by applying their knowledge and skills to increase their revenue and skill set and increase their appreciation for nomadic lifestyle;
7. Raise awareness of nomadic lifestyle to domestic and foreign visitors.

Without the approval and participation of the local community, the objectives of this project could not have been achieved. The central focus of this project remains attending to the interests of the community rather than the individual in order to achieve sustainable and alternative livelihoods that enhance the community’s living standards and empower them. In order to achieve these aims, the project required active participation of the interested community members in the tourism sector.

Due to its inclusive management structure and attractiveness to tourists, this approach in tourism has come to be highly regarded by government authorities and other parties. On numerous occasions, representatives from the subtribe have been invited to training sessions and press conferences to express their opinions and present their experiences of the project.

Among the achievements of this project have been capturing the attention of policy-makers and public authorities for the promotion of community-based eco-tourism. This has led to the support of similar projects elsewhere and the consideration of local communities in the decision-making process of related issues. Other achievements include enhancing the awareness of ICCAs among policy and decision makers and promoting the role communities play in public protection and management plans of natural resources.

The project was a fertile field for the participation of women in all stages of planning, preparation and assessment, especially:



- Women participating in decision making on issues in which they play an important role, e.g. handicrafts, local foods and pastries, traditional tribal clothes, traditional stories, medicinal plant and herbal identification, etc.;
- Integrating women in meetings, workshops, and exhibitions related to the project as well as promoting their role in the administration and execution of the project.

Because of the suitability of this model in other nomadic communities, as understood from the implementation of this project, facilitators are expanding the project into other tribal areas. The project was a small-scale initiative that does not require extensive construction or financial investment for its launching and depends on the existing traditional customs, values, and infrastructure of the local community. Community-based ecotourism development projects in the customary land of the nomadic people are an appropriate model for understanding the wilderness, conservation, and sustainable use of biodiversity, familiarising others with the culture and customs of nomadic life and better understanding the relationship nomads have with environmental conservation.



Figure 2: Various activities carried out during the SGP project in Heybatlu subtribe, Qashqai Tribal Confederacy.



### **PROJECT 3: ICCA and Rangeland restoration to achieve sustainable livelihoods through traditional management of water resources and alternative forage production**

*Qurt subtribe of Shish Bayli Tribe, Qashqai Tribal Confederacy*

Qurt is one of the twenty subtribes in the Shish Bayli tribe of the Qashqai Tribal Confederacy in Southwest Iran. The summering and wintering grounds of this community are located in Fars and Bushehr provinces. Climate change and following successive droughts during past years have degraded the pastures in some parts of their territory and a considerable part of rangeland plants have dried off. Consequently, they confront shortage of forage for livestock and to find new resources of feed, they have to change the migration time. All above cases lead to excessive grazing and gradual rangeland degradation. Meeting this problem, they began to think of forage crops to compensate for the shortage of animal feed and to prevent the advance of degradation.

Considering the water shortage in this area, traditional water management through *qanat* dredging and earth dam construction are solutions suggested by the Council of Elders and this project was prepared based on this issue with the help of Cenesta. Along with the restoration of water resources, another objective of this project was providing better rangeland management through avoiding overgrazing, which resulted in the restoration and improvement of other biodiversity resources and sustainable livelihoods.

The local Qurt community began to think of forage crops to compensate for the shortage of animal feed and to simultaneously prevent the advance of rangeland degradation.

Considering the water shortage in this area, the Council of Elders suggested traditional water management through *qanat* dredging and earth dam construction as potential solutions. In addition to the restoration of one of the *qanats*, the local community also decided to invest some of the funding towards the construction of a polymer pool in front of a second *qanat*; thus providing an alternative means for water collection. The combination of increased water supply and suitable plain fields nearby, it would be possible for agriculture to produce forage for livestock as a supplement to rangeland grazing and browsing, thus contributing to the restoration of nearby rangelands and the diversification of local livelihoods. To quote the tribal project manager, “In our wintering grounds, the rangelands are having babies [producing flowers and seeds] at the same time as our sheep and goats. This project will help us avoid putting this burden on the rangelands at the time of their reproduction....”





Figure 3: Various activities carried out during SGP project in Qurt subtribe, Qashqai Tribal Confederacy

## **PROJECT 4: sustainable management of natural resources and livelihood empowerment of nomadic pastoralism in the face of climate change**

### *Chodari Independent Tribe*

The Chodari nomadic pastoralists are an independent tribe in the Khar-Touran region. Their territory is located outside of the Touran protected area and it is suffering Progressive environmental degradation due to tightening territorial access in the past and droughts.

The main goal of the SGP project had consisted of using the local communities' indigenous knowledge to revive customary management of natural resources in the indigenous nomadic pastoralist territory. The objectives were:

- To reduce pressure over rangelands and conserve their floral diversity;
- To develop activities that improve livelihoods in coping with climate change effects;
- To improve management of natural resources and livelihoods;
- Collection and classification of native plant cover in a tribal herbarium—first of its kind in the world;
- To prevent sand dunes formation, and
- To stabilize seasonal as well as urban migration patterns.

### *A Brief Report of Activities*

In the **Khar-Touran region**, which includes a protected area with several categories of protection, as well as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, two ICCAs have been included: the Chodari independent tribe of camel herders and breeders, as well as the small Abolhassani tribal confederacy. Cenesta has investigated the preliminary ecological characteristics: the work being done for the conservation of nature is very innovative.

During the project, Chodari's representatives have been negotiating with the Livestock Research Centre of the Ministry of Agriculture on a project for comparing different modes of Camel breeding. Cenesta has been in contact with the Society of Camel Herders of Iran. The primary goal was to introduce the project proposal and request information on potential areas for its implementation.



The society recommended a pilot study of 50 camels in the Chodari Tribe. Chodari's representatives attended the First Camel Congress of the National Scientific Camel Society in Mashhad in 2014, one of the objectives being to re-activate the project.



*Figure 4. Various activities carried out during SGP project in Chodari Independent Tribe.*

## National Meetings and workshops

### *A) Meetings and workshops with DoE*

In 2014, Cenesta and nomadic tribes' representatives organised several meetings with Dr Keykha, the Deputy Head of the DoE for biological diversity, as well as two workshops regarding the recognition of ICCAs. The first workshop was organised by the SGP and aimed at introducing SGP projects to Dr Keykhah and to demonstrate how the SGP projects relate to both the recognition of the proposed ICCAs (SGP pilot projects) and to the aims and objectives of the DoE, including Iran's commitment to the CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) and the Aichi targets.

The second workshop was organised by the Director General (Mr Moghaddasi) of the Division of Protected Areas, DoE. In addition, this workshop was designed as an advocacy effort to introduce the notion of ICCAs and the importance of co-management models to the various bureaux of the DoE. These actions raised awareness and created capacity for the DoE to facilitate the recognition of the proposed ICCAs and help legitimise the Action within a broader context of national priorities and international conventions.

### *B) Meetings and conferences on camel*

- The Chodari have been negotiating with the Livestock Research Centre of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (LRC) a project for comparing different modes of camel breeding in 2014. The Livelihood working group of Cenesta has assessed potentials of the SGP projects on camel breeding and the Action's third. Cenesta has been in contact with the Society of Camel Herders of Iran. The primary goal was to introduce the project proposal and request information on potential areas for its implementation. The society recommended a pilot study of 50 Camels in the Chodari Tribe.
- Nomadic tribes' (Taklé, Chodari, Qurt and Toroud) and Cenesta's representatives attended in a conference of the National Scientific Camel Society in Mashhad, 2014.



A) Figure 5. Meetings and conferences on camel

### *C) Camel Summit Workshop*

The First National Camel Summit Workshop was held on Mount Savalán in Taklé Tribe's summering grounds, Shahsevan Tribal Confederacy territory, in July 2015. Participants included representatives from the Shahsevan Tribal Confederacy, Qashqai Tribal Confederacy, Abolhassani Tribal Confederacy, Chodari and Toroud Tribes, Sangsari Tribal Confederacy, Qeshm ICCAs, UNINOMAD, UNICAMEL and government officials such as



the Governor of Sar'ain District of Ardabil province, other national and provincial government agencies, Camel Scientific Society, academics and local and national media representatives. The aim of this Summit Workshop was restoring and upgrading the status of the camel in nomadic and local community livelihoods and to promote the conservation of the two-humped camel which is found among Shahsevan and Turkmen tribes of northern Iran. Dr Ilse Kohler Rollefson of the League for Pastoralist Peoples and Endogenous Livestock Development (LPP), a camel and indigenous livestock expert and veterinarian, was invited to participate in the Camel Summit Workshop.

During this 3-day workshop, various subjects were discussed and a field visit to the Taklé Tribe summering grounds was organised. During the Camel Workshop, the participating camel herders from various tribes and local communities had direct contact with the Camel Scientific Committee of Mashhad University as well as access to Dr Rollefson. During the various working groups, many Q&A sessions were held in which the IPs/LCs discussed their point of view on camel herding.



Figure 6: The First National Camel Summit Workshop, Taklé Tribe, Shahsevan Tribal Confederacy

#### *D) Advocacy Meetings for Qurt Subtribe's Water Resources*

Since the allocated fund from the SGP project was not enough for reconstruction operations, during 2014-2015, the representative of Qurt CBO and Cenesta's facilitator began consultation with the soil and water bureau of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development for co-financing.

They explained the importance and necessity of traditional irrigation restoration for the Qurt subtribe as an issue of maintaining local livelihoods and contributing to biodiversity conservation. Climate change and the subsequent trend towards successive droughts over the past years have degraded the pastures in some parts of the Qurt territory and a considerable part of rangeland plants have dried off. As a result, indigenous and nomadic peoples confront shortages of forage for livestock and they are forced to change migration periods in order to find new resources for fodder. The excessive grazing during inopportune times of the rangeland life cycle has led to the gradual degradation of local biodiversity.



*Figure 7. Consultation Meetings with Soil and Water Bureau of the Ministry of Agriculture & Rural Development*

### **International events**

#### *A) Attending the workshop on Democratising Agricultural Research for Food Sovereignty and Peasant Agrarian Cultures*

Two tribal representatives, one from the Shahsevan Tribal Confederacy and another from the Qashqai Tribal Confederacy, a farmer, and two representatives from Cenesta attended a workshop on “Democratising Agricultural Research for Food Sovereignty and Peasant Agrarian Cultures,” which was held in St. Ulrich, Germany, 22-25 September 2013. The core goal of the workshop was to provide space to enable local actors to share their experiences on the process and outcomes of the Democratising Food and Agricultural Research initiative and present their views on what is needed to secure future livelihoods, rights, and culture. An exhibition was held to facilitate the exchange of knowledge among participants. During the exhibition, representatives from Iran presented the ICCA and the EPPB (Evolutionary Participatory Plant Breeding) approaches. Cenesta's view is that food sovereignty is dependent on the empowerment and official recognition of ICCAs. In other words, once an ICCA is recognised any associated communities are a step closer to direct control over their food products.





### B) Indigenous Terra Madre<sup>3</sup> (Slow Food) Conference



discussions, participants had the opportunity to focus on their own concepts of progress and development.

From 3 to 7 November 2015, a representative of Heybatlu subtribe, Qashqai Tribal Confederacy—a woman in charge of the SGP project—attended the Terra Madre Conference in Shillong, Meghalaya, India. This conference included representatives of communities from all over the world who are notable for the quality and sustainability of their production methods, and provided them with a forum in which they could exchange positive experiences.

Two workshops, visits to local villages and a food festival took place. Through workshops and



<sup>3</sup> Terra Madre is a project conceived by Slow Food as a result of its growth and development and its conviction that “eating is an agricultural act and producing is a gastronomic act.”