

BIODIVERSITY

DESERTIFICATION

EIECP

Support Programme to the National Environmental Action Plan: Siwa Oasis Amelioration Egypt

- › CAPACITY BUILDING
- › COLLABORATIVE MANAGEMENT
- › ECO-TOURISM
- › ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY
- › SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT





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 the 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 will be completed at the beginning of 2003 and includes five components. The second phase, under final formulation, will start in 2003 and will expand to nine components, including the second phase for Siwa Oasis. The Siwa depression, covering almost 1,000 sq km, is located in the Northwest part of the Egyptian Western Desert. In the depression, the ground-water reaching the surface has created a network of oases, of which Siwa is the largest. The only permanently inhabited parts of the region are Siwa and Qara oases, but some of the 'abandoned oases' are used seasonally for grazing

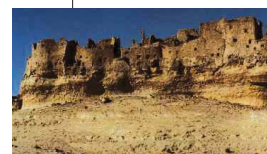
by Bedouins from the Mediterranean coastal desert. Dune fields, gravel plains, saline lakes, cliffs and scattered acacia groves give the region a rich variety of landscapes and provide habitat for a diversity of flora and fauna. Plants include the endangered wild cotton and unique varieties of date palms. Siwa is probably the last refuge in Egypt for several highly endangered mammal species such as dorcas gazelle, fennec fox and slender-horned gazelle. Eleven traditional *qabilas* (tribes) live in the region totalling some 20,000 people. The traditional economy relies mainly on flood-irrigated agriculture in household gardens, which support an abundant production of dates, olives and alfalfa when properly managed. Alfalfa is used to feed small livestock. The cash economy depends on the sale of dates and olives to external buyers. Siwa is one of the few Egyptian oasis communities that have managed to retain most of its traditional characteristics. This was partially due to the region's isolation, which was broken only recently by the construction of asphalt roads connecting Siwa and Qara to Marsa Matruh, some 300 km away. As the people of Siwa confronted the modern world, both their culture and their environment were exposed to the risk of disruption. The new road lead to many investors coming to the region. The Government and the private sector have invested in oil and gas production, large-scale agricultural projects and small-scale industry such as bottling mineral

water. Tourism has become an emergent key economic sector: some hotels already exist and several others are under construction. The ancient *karsheef* fortified towns and dwellings, unique examples of oases' cultural tradition, have been largely abandoned and left to collapse. At the same time, many new development initiatives did not adequately consider the impact on the environment. Land was rapidly purchased by outside investors, the social fabric of the region started to change and traditional methods of sustainable use of resources were no longer practised. The communities in Siwa needed support to deal with socio-economic and environmental problems. Major issues were the introduction and diffusion of sustainable agricultural practices and improved participatory processes, to strengthen the capacity of the local communities to develop collaborative management agreements and institutions. In this context, the Siwa Oasis Environmental Amelioration Project was formulated under the umbrella of the EIECP. The first phase will come to an end in December 2002, after approximately four years of operations. The second phase is planned to start immediately afterward. Matruh Governorate is the institutional counterpart to the Project, and the World Conservation Union (IUCN) is responsible for its implementation. As the economy improves, it is expected that communities will focus more on environmental management, putting to good use revitalised communal strengths, organisational skills and experience developed in the first phase.



Siwa town

El Gara ancient town



Goal, objectives and expected outputs

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

Specific objectives are as follows.

- ➊ Strengthen Egyptian capacities to analyse, plan and implement adequate measures for the rehabilitation and conservation of natural, cultural and man-made environments.
- ➋ Enhance current strategies and approaches to protect and expand the available natural resources base, aiming to increase productivity, reduce migration and improve the living conditions in the rural areas.
- ➌ Contribute to reinforce the role of EEAA, as the central coordinating and supervising body, and of its partner institutions for the protection and promotion of the environment.

Within this framework, the main objective of the Siwa Oasis Project is to enhance the capacity of key stakeholders and institutions to manage in a sustainable way the natural and cultural heritage



A marine fossil in Siwa desert

Committee meeting



resources, while supporting the development of community initiatives. In consideration of the temporal and conceptual continuity between the first and second phase of the Project, objectives and expected results for both are illustrated together here below.

The Project has three specific objectives.

- ➊ Establishment of a collaborative management system for the Protected Area in Siwa region, to preserve biodiversity and cultural heritage through their sustainable and equitable use.
 - zThe Area will also serve as a focus for regional planning and development of environment-friendly economic activities.
- ➋ Contribute to the development of the Siwa region as a leading eco-tourism site, by engaging local communities, the private sector and other key stakeholders, including non governmental organisations (NGOs), in the diversification and development of non-intrusive eco-tourism facilities and services.
- ➌ Strengthen the mandate and institutional capacity of EEAA to develop and enforce environmental policy in the Siwa region.

Expected outputs are as follows.

- ➊ The institutional capacity for field conservation is strengthened through legal, human resources and infrastructure development.
- ➋ The collaborative management of the Protected Area is operational and based on an appropriate, equitable and sustainable use of biodiversity resources.



Oasis architectural style

- ➊ An interdisciplinary Collaborative Management Team is established to assist the Protected Area Management Unit (PAMU) staff in developing and implementing collaborative management agreements. These will include the allocation of usufruct and stewardship rights to local communities over given areas and natural resources.
- ➋ The monitoring and evaluation system of biodiversity resources, and of their utilisation and management, is tested and operational.





Detail of oasis architectural style

- The local and national constituencies for biodiversity conservation are established, through education and communication activities.
- Eco-tourism activities are promoted and managed to demonstrate innovative and environmentally compatible economic ventures, which allow the development of a sustainable livelihood system.
- An overall biodiversity strategy and action plan for the Siwa region is developed and biodiversity conservation is firmly inscribed in the local development agenda.
- The management capacity of the PAMU and Matruh Governorate is enhanced.



Dates selection for marketing

Field training for extensionists in Abu Shuruf



Implementation and results

So far, during the first phase of Project implementation, the following activities were carried out and results were achieved.

- Detailed study and research of the area, and elaboration of maps and multi-disciplinary assessments, aimed at improving the scientific knowledge on the region and at the development of agricultural resources in the Oasis.
- Establishment of approximately 200 demonstration plots for a sustainable agricultural production, the rehabilitation of unproductive basic land and agro-forestry activity.
- Development of income-generating activities, through the marketing of agricultural products and the establishment of family-based micro and small enterprises.
- Involvement of the local traditional Authorities in the management of project activities, through seminars, workshops and the set-up and management of a revolving fund.
- Establishment of a local Association, which has developed into a well-established local NGO, and which represents the Siwan Community in credit management.
- Capacity building of local Project staff, through courses and study tours, to ensure the sustainability of Project interventions.



Micro irrigation system (sprinkler) demonstration plot Bahi el Dine

- Environmental awareness activity, through the diffusion of thematic messages and campaigns, slogans and advertising material.

Twelve local committees have been formed, which identified farmers entitled to receive loans to introduce sustainable agricultural practices in their plots. The funds have been used to promote agricultural diversification such as animal husbandry managed by women, and small agro-industries. Building upon the experience gained during the first phase, the second phase of the Siwa Oasis Project will continue to support local communities in the management of their natural resources and extend community initiatives to include the sustainable use of biodiversity and cultural resources. The Project will work with the private sector to develop cultural and eco-tourism as a key sector of the local economy. It will also establish a Protected Area and build the capacity of local Government institutions to manage the natural and cultural resources of the region. Besides these primarily conservation objectives, the Project will develop a package for sustainable agriculture as well as a systemic management plan for solid waste.

