

The Wetlands and Poverty Reduction Project

Linking wetland conservation and poverty alleviation



WETLANDS
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Wetlands are vital to life - they provide water for our basic needs and our economic prosperity. In the developing world millions of people rely entirely on wetlands for their livelihoods and food security. Wetlands are also important for biodiversity and play a key role by affording habitat to many rare and endangered species. However, the value of wetlands is often considered solely in terms of their economic and social benefits, and the importance of conserving wetlands and their biodiversity may not be recognised.

Wetlands are the most threatened of all the earth's ecosystems. Yet despite their importance the world's wetlands are frequently mismanaged, and many are now so degraded that the people who rely directly on them for their livelihoods have become more vulnerable to or have fallen deeper into poverty.

Wetlands International aims to contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals through its Wetlands and Poverty Reduction Project (WPRP). The project aims to act as a catalyst to promote the integration of sustainable wetland management into poverty reduction strategies by influencing local, national and international policies and practice.

The WPRP will undertake a range of integrated activities with the aim of ensuring that wetlands are managed sustainably. The activities are organised into four thematic areas: Policy and Partnership, Demonstration Projects, Capacity Building, and Awareness and Outreach.



Budget

The total budget of the Wetlands and Poverty Reduction Project is € 6.2 million, excluding in-kind contributions and additional funding leveraged during the programme implementation. The project started in early 2005 and will run until 2008, with the following components:

- Policy and Partnership: € 502.000 (8%)
- Demonstration Projects: € 2.711.000 (44%)
- Capacity Building: € 1.259.000 (20%)
- Outreach and Awareness: € 590.000 (10%)
- Project Implementation: € 1.140.000 (18%)



The Wetlands and Livelihoods Working Group

The Wetlands and Livelihoods Working Group oversees and supports the technical implementation of the WPRP. As an international think-tank comprising representatives of different fields of expertise, the Working Group acts as an 'advisory committee' for the project, providing a strategic overview and external technical guidance to its implementation. By involving representatives of major conservation and development agencies, government and the private sector in the Working Group it is hoped that the members will be able to share knowledge and experience in development initiatives, and that lessons learned through the project will also be shared. The Working Group will develop strategic papers, designed to influence policy and practice at all levels, on the integration of nature conservation and socio-economic issues in order to reduce the poverty faced by many wetland communities. The Working Group has established sub-committees to oversee and help guide the project through the selection and implementation of demonstration projects, allocation of seed funding and planning of key partnership workshops and meetings. Membership of the Working Group is open to anyone who would like share their experience and contribute to finding solutions to eradicating poverty in wetland areas.

Policy and partnership

Decision makers often do not understand the importance of healthy wetlands, and therefore do not perceive the protection of wetlands to be a priority. Raising decision makers' awareness of wetland values is a first step towards sustainably managed wetlands.



Furthermore, stakeholders with competing interests need to work together to find common solutions and bridge their differences.

Conservation and development organisations tend to work to their own agendas. The WPRP sets out to bring these organisations together so that they can share their knowledge and expertise in order to realise common goals.

Decision-making at the local level is often part of a much larger, complex process. Local stakeholders can participate effectively in these processes only if they are set within a framework of viable national policies and supported by authoritative institutions.

The WPRP aims to facilitate dialogue between these sectors and identify a common agenda that provides complementary solutions to wetland conservation and poverty reduction. Through the policy and partnership activities of the WPRP it is aimed that the capacity of the conservation and development sectors will be strengthened so that they can influence poverty reduction strategies.

The WPRP adopts a partnership approach: new relationships will be built between national, regional and international environmental-management and poverty-reduction agencies and organisations.

An international workshop will be held in January 2006 at which stakeholders will decide focal areas for the partnerships. Workshop participants will identify ways in which cross-sectoral integration can be improved so that, from the outset, project beneficiaries have a greater understanding of the issues that they will confront.



An example of wetland management

Inner Niger River Delta

The Inner Niger River Delta in the Western Sahel zone supports more than a million people who make their living as fishermen, cattle breeders or farmers, using the annual rise and fall of the waters in the river and its floodplains. This wetland is vitally important not just for people: the Niger Delta is also home to nearly 4 million waterbirds. Two dams have been constructed upstream on the Niger River. Although these dams have improved irrigated agriculture, the benefits they provide vary from season to season. In dry periods the dams can reduce the flow of water by up to 30%, and this has had a severe impact on downstream water users. Now a third dam has been proposed on the Niger River. It is vital that the many users of the Niger Delta are involved in decision making in relation to this dam before it is built. The sectoral approaches inherent in the institutions involved may not permit the establishment of an effective forum for local stakeholders to protect their resources and interests. A stakeholder-centred approach that facilitates wise decision making must be promoted in the assessment and location of this possible third dam on the Niger. The WPRP can facilitate capacity building for the stakeholders involved to equip them with the knowledge and awareness needed to have their views taken into account.

Demonstration projects

Whilst effective policy provides the framework, implementation on the ground is what matters. Furthermore, policy itself must be informed by the realities of practice.



The WPRP will establish five demonstration projects in which local partnerships illustrate how poverty reduction can be achieved through the wise use of wetlands. The five demonstration projects (four are planned for Africa and one in Asia) will be developed and implemented during the WPRP and will take a demand-driven approach.

The projects will set out to demonstrate, in a practical way, how a resilient wetland ecosystem can provide for both human needs and sustained biodiversity. Stakeholders in the demonstration projects will be encouraged to learn from the experience of others. Learning from the knowledge of indigenous stakeholders will be a guiding principle for the implementation of the projects.

One of the criteria for the projects to receive funding is the demonstrable commitment of an active partnership between conservation and development agencies and other sectoral interests in project planning and implementation. One of the mechanisms that will be tested in developing plans for the demonstration projects is the innovative Bio-rights programme.

Bio-rights

Bio-rights is an innovative financial instrument that can assist in reconciling poverty reduction with the sustainable use of natural resources in developing countries. The system involves payments by the global community to local stakeholders for biodiversity conservation services, thus compensating for the opportunity costs of sustainable use of their natural resources. The conditions for receiving funding are that the system is endorsed by both donors and local stakeholders and that the fulfilment of environmental goals is monitored and made transparent to the global community. Bio-rights allow the public value of key biodiversity wetland areas to be transferred over time to local stakeholders as a direct economic benefit. A win-win situation can be achieved, because global stakeholders profit from the long-term benefits of the natural resources and the environmental services provided by wetlands, while local people can gain an increased income, improved health and sustainable livelihoods.

In addition, local organisations, wetland managers and other stakeholders will be able to apply for seed funding support to assist them to research and develop other initiatives to improve their capacity to sustainably manage wetlands and address the livelihoods needs of local communities.



Seed Grant Fund

To encourage stakeholders to contribute to developing the best possible solutions for wetland conservation and local development, the WPRP will provide funding and technical support to assist in the development of new project ideas. The project's Seed Grant Fund is designed to support initiatives at the local level. Funds and technical support are available to help small NGOs or citizen groups develop partnerships or form coalitions with other organisations to develop funding proposals to promote sustainable wetland management that leads to poverty reduction. Funding is also available in the WPRP to develop training modules and resource materials and to facilitate exchange visits to demonstration areas.

Capacity building

Wetland management has to integrate environmental perspectives with livelihood benefits, especially the sustainable production of food. These approaches are seldom integrated in decision-making processes that establish management procedures. Socio-economic and biodiversity data are often not available to support decision making.



To foster understanding between partnerships and to ensure that demonstration projects become self-sustaining and replicable, it is important that local technical capacity and skills in wetland management are improved. Increased knowledge and knowledge management skills will help to improve stakeholders' ability to make informed choices and contribute to decision making.

Training courses

Practical wetland management planning skills will be further developed through training activities. The overall aim of the training will be the alleviation of poverty through sound wetland management.

The WPRP will make assessments that identify the capacity-building needs of

policy and decision makers, field workers and others involved in poverty reduction and sustainable wetland management, focussing on East and West Africa. Stakeholders will learn to help design modular training courses to meet their own needs. Workshops will be held, and representatives of key partners who will benefit from the training course will be invited to attend.



Capacity building in East and West Africa

The WPRP will link modular courses for capacity building with stakeholders involved in the implementation of demonstration sites to ensure that their region-specific needs are addressed. These courses will be implemented through already established regional training centres in East and West Africa.



Outreach and awareness

Policy and decision makers often lack awareness of the interconnection between functioning ecosystems and people's livelihoods and between environmental degradation and poverty.



There is, therefore, an immediate need for decision makers to be aware of and understand the links between poverty and environmental issues in relation to wetlands. This includes keeping abreast of the current research and wetland policy development, especially in relation to international laws, conventions and other relevant mechanisms.

Hence, awareness and outreach activities cut across all the WPRP's activities and are essential for promoting a collaborative approach, sharing lessons learned and stimulating new partnerships. The aim of the WPRP outreach activities is to ensure that people of influence make well-informed and transparent decisions on the exploitation of natural resources, and that their decisions are consistent with national and cross-boundary priorities, and grounded in an understanding of the implications of their decisions on people and the functioning of wetlands.

The WPRP's awareness-raising activities will explain the relationship between wetland degradation and the ensuing risks to socially and economically excluded groups. This will be shared with major donor agencies, governments, planners and those who implement development policy.

Outreach materials will be developed and workshops will be organised for local staff of aid agencies (multilateral and bilateral aid agencies, foundations and co-financing agencies). These workshops will provide information and training on methods and approaches for addressing poverty-environment issues in wetlands. In addition, lessons learned from the WPRP demonstration projects will help inform the exchange of information and ideas - and strengthen our abilities to reach out and generate awareness.

Important outputs of the WPRP will be a 'toolkit' and awareness raising material for outreach use and for assessing and evaluating poverty-reduction programmes in wetland areas.

These tools and other published materials will be made available on Wetlands International's website and in hard copy formats.



Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

Many of the WPRP activities will target countries where Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and Sustainable Development Strategies are under review or in development. These strategies are internally country-driven processes that the WPRP will seek to influence through its wide range of activities. Greater recognition of the value of wetlands in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and Sustainable Development Strategies will assist governments to achieve their poverty reduction goals through integrated approaches to wetland management.



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Wetlands International is an independent, non-for-profit organization. Wetlands International works globally, regionally and nationally to achieve the conservation and wise use of wetlands, to benefit biodiversity and human well-being.

For more information about the **Wetlands and Poverty Reduction Project** or to find out how your organization might be involved, please contact Wetlands International or visit our website www.wetlands.org

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