

ENABLING ACTIVITIES IN BIODIVERSITY

Country:	Sultanate of Oman
Project Title:	Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and Report to CBD
GEF Focal Area:	Biodiversity
Country Eligibility:	Convention ratified 8 February 1995
GEF Financing:	US\$ 266,000.-
Government Contribution:	In-kind
GEF Implementing Agency:	UNDP
GEF Focal Point:	Mahmoud Bin Mohammed Talib Al Zakwani, Director of Intl. Relations, Min. of Regl. Municipalities and Environment
National Executing Agency:	Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment (MRME)
CBD and CHM Focal Point:	Sadiq Al-Muscatti, Director General of Nature Protectorates
Estimated starting date:	September 1997
Duration of project:	12 months

Background

The Sultanate of Oman has a land area of 212,460 sq.km. consisting of gravel desert plains, areas of sand and mountain ranges, and is bordered by 2,092 km of coastline. It supports a human population of 2 million. Despite an arid climate over most of the country, it is an area of relatively high biodiversity, especially in the regions of higher precipitation, through seasonal rainfall and where the south-west monsoon produces mists or more continuous rainfall. Distinct bio-geographic regions support species found in Iran and Pakistan in the northern half of the country; with increasing influence of African species further south. There are also a number of relict species, both from former climates and from tectonic separation of land masses.

Terrestrial biodiversity is an important component of Oman's biodiversity. Rangelands and forests in this country are found to harbor a diverse array of different plant species, nearly 700 of which have been identified so far. The existence of many tree types and grasses common to different ecological zones have also been classified and this vegetation cover, particularly trees, helps in halting soil erosion and desert creep. The existence of a relatively large number of animals for this

of ecosystems and environmental characteristics and subsequently the diversity of life it is able to sustain.

Oman harbors the Arabian Gazelle, Wolf, Striped Hyena, Leopard, Ibex, Arabian Oryx, Arabian Tahr, Desert Fox, Gazelle and the Wild Cat among many other species. More than 400 types of birds have been identified, some of which are indigenous, others which depend on Oman in their migration routes between Oman, Africa, Asia, Europe and the Mediterranean. Terrestrial diversity is matched by both climatic and marine diversity are reflected in the array of marine life harbored by Oman, particularly fish. Her seas host a wide variety of vertebrates, invertebrates, crustaceans, both tropical and temperate species of fish as well as more than 20 species/subspecies of whales, dolphins, and porpoises as well as more than 70 species of coral recorded so far. In addition, five species of marine turtles of which four breed along the coasts of Oman have become of interest to both scientists and tourists.

Threatened and endemic wildlife are issues of concern and call for increased action regarding biodiversity in Oman. One third of the species identified during the past decade have been new to science. Most of the different wild plants found on the coasts of Oman include rare and recently discovered species which only emphasizes the high responsibility of the Sultanate of Oman for conserving and protecting its biodiversity. Large groups of insects have also become known to the world for the first time after their discovery and classification in Oman.

The plant communities include a number of endemic species. There is one endemic large mammal, as well as endemic species and sub-species of birds, small mammals, arthropods and corals amongst those so far identified.

Following the discovery of oil, bringing Oman into the upper middle income per capita bracket, a rapid programme of development was embarked on in 1970, leading to a sharp increase in the standard of living through the provision of basic infrastructures, including health, education, housing, road building and many other needs. Lately this has been followed by a move to diversify the economy away from dependence on diminishing oil reserves and towards creating an infrastructure of manufacturing industry, the exploitation of other fossil sources of wealth, agriculture as well as tourism. During this period, the population has grown at an estimated rate of 4.0% - one of the highest in the world.

The Sultanate's commitment to environmental protection has been demonstrated by a number of significant legal measures to prevent pollution, habitat damage and to protect wildlife, including a ban on the hunting of all wild animals in 1993. The establishment of nature reserves for the Arabian Tahr, the Arabian Oryx (re-introduced to the wild in a world-leading project), turtles, birds and a range of inter-tidal ecosystems, has taken place at intervals since 1973 based on an initial study of wildlife, habitats and threats that identified a preliminary system of protected areas for Oman 1986.

The project's goal was to prepare in-depth plans for a system of nature conservation areas (NCAs) in Oman. The resultant nature conservation programme was to form part of Oman's total land use strategy. The plans were to include prescriptions for policy and law; the design of NCA system, and proposals for the structure and operation of a Directorate General of Wildlife and Nature Conservation. The specific requirements for the proposed NCA system are gradually being implemented but are subject to both financial and human resource constraints.

The process of formal designation of further protected areas is now proceeding under the auspices of the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment. The process of management planning

Output 1 will emphasise a cost-effective and focused inventory exercise to ensure coverage without duplication. The development of a national data management system in the process would not only ensure that for the first time, all relevant data from different institutional and scientific sources are brought together and merged but also contribute to the development of future capacity reflecting best practice in this field.

Output 2 will emphasise the identification and development of innovative options and mechanisms for integrating biodiversity in mainstream development planning and sectors including assessment of the economic rationale and financing/revenue generating options. This output will rely on extensive consultation as well as the drafting of a number of scoping papers to identify national cost benefit options and potential trade-offs. These scoping papers will be prepared by national and international consultants and will form the basis for the selection of options which will form the foundation for the strategic choices to be taken and presented in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.

Output 3 will include the compilation of a national biodiversity strategy and action plan based on different sources of data and analyses already available as well as consultation at national and regional levels with different stakeholders. A key benefit of this output will be the action plan identifying priority projects and initiatives for public/private sector financing as well as potential international support.

Output 4 will enable the Sultanate of Oman to prepare an interim national report to the next CBD/COP thereby fulfilling one of its commitments as a signatory under the CBD while at the same time highlighting, the significance of Oman's conservation efforts in the global context.

The project will be implemented through the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment. Three departments will be of particular importance - the Directorates for Nature Protectorates, the Directorate for Environmental Affairs and the Directorate of Public Awareness and Guidance as they comprise all major environment related function with the Ministry. In addition the regional municipalities which maintain environmental focal points will be actively involved to strengthen awareness about biodiversity and the need for its conservation in Oman.

In preparing an effective framework for biodiversity conservation Oman faces three significant challenges:

- dispersed data on the nation's natural resources and biodiversity across different Ministries, the Diwan of Royal Court and scientific institutions
- available data varies in terms of quality, coverage and in some cases is dated
- national expertise in biodiversity related fields is still very limited resulting in a substantial need for technical assistance and support

The project seeks to address these by emphasising the linkage between stocktaking and strategy formulation with communication, awareness raising and capacity building for biodiversity conservation and management focusing on the national staff who work in the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment and the associated three directorates. In drawing together all existing data and establishing a data management system it will contribute towards a national capacity to collect, process and synthesise biodiversity related data for future management. In the process it will provide a focus and significant boost to the newly formed technical working groups (see also page 3) on mammals and plants which aim to bring together government staff, scientists

and volunteers. This process will also provide the informational basis for developing communications and awareness raising activities aimed at a wide range of target groups - including municipal staff, mid and senior level staff of sectoral ministries, policy makers, the private sector and the general public. The Directorate for Public Awareness and Guidance represents a major asset in this context and will play a significant role in the dissemination of public awareness on biodiversity through its existing links to schools, the printed as well as electronic media .

In terms of outputs 2 and 3 the project will implement a sequential process based on the following steps: briefing seminars for different stakeholder groups (e.g. inter-ministerial groups; experts and scientific community; municipal staff; policy makers); consultations and drafting of discussion papers on key strategy elements for biodiversity conservation; review of findings and recommendations, through expert groups and stakeholder consultations; dissemination of preliminary strategy through media and focused seminars; national workshop with stakeholder groups. Throughout this process the project will select a number of specific cases/sites (e.g. coastal/marine resources; conservation areas such as the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary/World Heritage Site) to ensure practical application and the effective participation of local communities.

The project will be implemented under the auspices of the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment while the already established Technical Committee - consisting of high-level representatives from relevant the environment, agriculture, fisheries, water sectoral ministries - will provide the steering committee function. MRME will designate an internal working group of technical staff to lead the implementation of the work programme. In light of the unusually high capacity constraints faced by the Sultanate of Oman it is essential that the project will ensure the contribution of significant technical expertise and support through national and international consultants. Their function will be threefold: provide strategic guidance and support in developing process and strategy; contribute technical and scientific backstopping support; enhance the operational capacity of MRME to undertake this innovative process. In this context, it should be pointed out that in view of Oman's current limitations in terms of trained staff in disciplines relevant to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use strategies, international consultants will be drawn upon to the extent that the expertise required could not be found in Oman (see also "Deviation from Criteria and Norms").

Coverage without Duplication

The Sultanate of Oman has invested substantial resources of its own during the past 25 years to develop a basic framework for environmental management and conservation. This framework has essentially focused on captive breeding, parks and hunting/fishing regulation and has only provided for limited national capacity building biodiversity management, strategies and data collection. Given the virtual absence of systematic scientific data, management strategies, legislation and corresponding institutions until 1970 it is understandable that despite this extraordinary effort the integration of biodiversity considerations in the development process of a rapidly evolving and growing economy remains to be achieved.

Oman's environmental managers and institutions are keen to avoid duplicating efforts given their severe resource and capacity constraints. The decision to apply for support through the GEF for a biodiversity enabling activity - taken after careful consideration - acknowledges the fact that despite the development of a basic framework of environmental data and initiatives the country is faced with the fundamental challenge of how to integrate, finance, and institutionalise the conservation and sustainable use of its biodiversity resources in the future development of its economy.

The focus of this enabling activity is therefore not on new research and data generation but rather on the systematic collection, integration and utilisation of the already existing information in the

context of a strategy and action plan that will generate a new level of understanding among policy makers and stakeholder groups, develop a convincing framework and rationale for public and private sector investment in the conservation and sustainable use of Oman's biodiversity and enable Oman to fulfil its obligations under the Convention of Biological Diversity.

The Sultanate of Oman currently receives no international financial support for biodiversity related activities. Despite severe resource constraints Oman has - through MRME and the Diwan of Royal Court - begun to designate a growing number of protected areas, pass legislation to protect the environment and institutionalise environmental assessments, train a growing cadre of environmental specialists and undertake a programme of environmental awareness raising and education. The proposed enabling activity aims to build on and enhance the existing but limited momentum for biodiversity conservation in Oman.

Time Plan and Sequencing

The project will follow the sequence recommended in the WRI/IUCN/UNEP Guidelines. Activities will start in September 1997, last for 12 months, and be carried out according to the following time table:

Activity/Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Designation of steering committee & working groups	x	x										
Finalization of activity schedule and TOR for consultants	x	x										
Assessment of existing information & development of data base		x	x	x	x							
Sensitisation and public awareness/outreach to stockholders of project			o	n	g	o	i	n	g			
Assessment of options - workshops/seminars with other sectors of economy			x	x	x	x	x	x				
Training, seminars/Briefing on role of BD in local /national development						x	x	x	x	x		
Consultation and Preparation of BD strategy & Action plan							x	x	x	x		
National workshop to review and endorse NBSAP										x		
Preparation of interim national report to the CoP. Preparation and dissemination of final plan and report.						x					x	x

The provisional timetable envisages that MRME will undertake a briefing of the Technical Committee, designate the Ministerial working group, agree on a timetable and ToR for consultants and secure the necessary external assistance during the first month of the project. The working group will begin the process of establishing the framework for a new data management system during the months 1 and 2 to assure timely availability of data for subsequent activities which will be undertaken during month 2-5.

A series of briefing seminars on biodiversity and the strategy process will be developed and undertaken during months 2-10 progressively evolving from an information/awareness raising focus to active involvement of stakeholders in strategy formulation. In particular, a national seminar will be held with interested parties in order to ensure a full dissemination of the information gathered during the assessment exercise. These will be complemented by activities through the directorate of Public Awareness and Guidance focusing on public outreach through materials for policy makers, managers, the private sector and schools utilising media such as posters, brochures, articles, video, television and radio programmes.

During months 3-8 the project will organise a series of strategic workshops with relevant experts and stakeholders which will focus on key elements and options for linking biodiversity conservation to Oman's long-term sustainable development strategy. The workshops will draw upon specific inputs prepared through the project to inform and guide the review process. In these workshops themes such as (i) the characteristics of biodiversity; (ii) reasons and root causes of biodiversity loss and degradation; (iii) possible options for the management of biodiversity; (iv) sound and sustainable use biodiversity; (v) will be discussed in relation to future conservation, management and monitoring plans. The participants in these strategic workshops will include the Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment and its Technical Committee and the Directorate for Nature Protectorates, the Directorate for Environmental Affairs and the Directorate for Public Awareness and Guidance Ministry of Agriculture. It will also include the Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry of Transport, the Tourism Authority and the Ministry of Water in addition to universities and research institutions

Based on these inputs the working group with consultant support will develop a biodiversity strategy and action plan to be discussed and reviewed during a national workshop involving all relevant stakeholders. Following the National Workshop, the final versions of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan will be prepared during months 11 and 12 and will include a specific set of recommendations for follow-up in terms of priorities, potential funding options and specific projects.

Training inputs will be provided to representatives of sectoral ministries, regional municipalities staff as well as other relevant technical personnel in the country. This familiarisation will be provided in the form of seminars and workshops co-ordinated through the working groups and drawing upon the relevant expertise in the various stages of the project. This will include coverage of issues such as: the Convention on Biodiversity, the role and content of a biodiversity strategy, identification of biodiversity - economic linkages, identification of sustainable use options, etc.

Best Practice

The methodology for the implementation of the project will be based on the "Guidelines for Country Study on Biological Diversity (UNEP 1993), the "Guide to the Convention on Biological diversity (IUCN 1994) and the "Guidelines for Preparing National Biodiversity Planning" (WRI/IUCN/UNEP)

Assessment of existing information will be undertaken through the working group with support from local and international consultants. For subsequent activities, the Sultanate of Oman is interested in incorporating biodiversity into the mainstream of development and is therefore

interested in developing strategies, options as well as policy guidance and capacity to address the issues in terms of its impact on the process of national development planning. The Sultanate of Oman is also aware of the nine criteria for best practice contained in the Enabling Activities Operational Criteria document and will follow them as closely as possible.

Project Financing (in US\$)

	PRODUCT	PROCESS	TOTAL
Stocktaking and Inventory -National consultants -International consultants -Travel -Workshops	37'000 10'000 21'000 4'000 2'000		37'000
Identification Analysis of Options -Workshops/seminars -Documentation/Case studies -National consultants -International consultant -Communication/Awareness raising/Training Activities -Travel	39'000 2'000 5'000 30'000 2'000	80'000 15'000 4'000 6'000 38'000 10'000 7'000	119'000
Strategy and action plan -National consultants -International consultants -Documentation/ Dissemination of draft/ (English/Arabic) -Consultations/Workshop -Travel	22,000 5'000 8'000 2'000 5'000 2'000	56'000 9'000 20'000 10'000 12'000 5'000	78'000
First National report -Documentation (Arabic/English) -National consultant -International consultant -Consultations/Review	13'000 8'000 5'000	5'000 2'000 3'000	18'000
Clearing House Mechanism -Hardware -Software -Modem -Recurrent Access Costs/Internet -Technical Set-up Fees -Internet and E-mail Training		14'000 4'000 1'000 500 3'800 700 4'000	14'000
TOTAL	111'000	155'000	266'000

Deviation from Criteria and Norms

While no cost norms are exceeded it is useful to note that the project envisages substantive support through international/national consultants. This reflects Oman's current limitations in terms of trained staff in disciplines relevant to biodiversity conservation and sustainable use strategies. Thus both stocktaking and identification of options steps will rely on substantive inputs from a specialist in NBSAPs, who will also play a lead role in identifying the economic linkages and financing options available to the Sultanate of Oman. In addition scientific expertise will be required to analyse and process available data sets

It should also be noted that, again, while the cost norms are not exceeded, the CHM requests are at the ceiling of the norm. This is largely done in view of requests received from Oman which puts a high emphasis on establishing an effective data management and exchange mechanism system which has been identified as a priority in terms of ensuring the appropriate data management and dissemination.

Institutional Framework and Project Implementation

The Ministry of Regional Municipalities and Environment will be implementing the project and has indicated that it seeks to enlist technical advice and co-ordination support from IUCN. The Ministry will designate a Project Co-ordinator from its existing senior staff who will manage and oversee the implementation of the proposed activity schedule and report to the inter-ministerial Technical Committee.

The MRME through its direct responsibilities for municipalities and environment combines thematic expertise with a regional structure throughout the country. Dialogue with other Ministries will be established both through the Technical Committee as well as bilateral meetings with relevant sectors. Local/international consultants will be contracted based on a survey of expertise required to support to Ministry where necessary. Internally it will implement the project through a working group of relevant technical staff drawn from the Ministry's three environmental directorates responsible for environmental issues, to be established at the beginning of the project.

The execution of the project will be subject to Tri-Partite Review (TPR) according to UNDP rules and procedures.

Preparation of the Interim and First National Report to CoP

An interim national report will be prepared following the prevailing guidance from the CBD. The interim report will be made available to the CoP, however, in view of the available time, the final report will only be completed by the end month 12 of the project.

ANNEX 1

Enabling Activity Commitment	Output	Capacity Building		Public Participation	Comments
		Inst. Strength	Training		
Stocktaking & Assessment based on existing information					
- Biodiversity & biolog. Resources	x				1
- Cross-sectoral framework	x				1
- Policy and regulatory framework	x				1
- Institutional & human capacity	x				1
- Analysis of root causes of BD loss	x				1
- Technologies for conserv. & sustainable use	x				1
- Activities with adverse impacts	x				1
- Existing measures and programmes	x				1
- Preliminary statement of objectives	x				1
- Identification of gaps	x				1
- Assessment of existing needs	x				1
Identification & analyses of Options to meet the objectives of the CAD					
- Strategies for conservation	x	x	x	x	2
- Strategies for sustainable use	x	x	x	x	2
- Strategies for benefit sharing	x	x	x	x	2
Planning and Preparation of a Strategy and Plan					
- National strategy	x	x	x	x	2
- National action plan	x	x		x	2
Preparation of the Interim and first National report					
- First national report	x			x	

X: Activity undertaken by the project

Footnotes to the Activity Matrix

1. A number of important assessments and reports have been prepared on elements of Oman's biodiversity during the past 15—20 years. Among these the following are considered to be of continued relevance and importance:

- System of National Conservation Areas
- Coastal Zone Management Plan
- National Conservation Strategy
- Coral Reef Management Plan

In addition to these reports a number of research projects and scientific expeditions have produced valuable information while institutions such as the Museum of Natural History have begun to establish collections of specimens and data. In addition there is a growing body of relevant but dispersed data being collected through other Government ministries and their departments.

While this information represents an important asset it must be viewed in the context of the limitations associated with both the process and the comprehensiveness of the various initiatives and sources. So far much of this information generated through international experts and ad hoc projects remains 'locked up' in a few reports and the know-how of a limited number of experts.

The enabling activity thus must focus on both integrating and merging of the available data as well as making it understandable and usable for resource planners, managers and above all, policy makers. Most importantly the project should contribute towards relating the available knowledge on Oman's biodiversity to the overall framework for national planning and economic development.

2. The National Conservation Strategy represents a useful basis for elaborating options, strategies and actions for biodiversity conservation. However, its limitations in terms of actuality and relevance to Oman 5 years after its drafting are widely recognised. In some areas such as coastal and marine issues as well as coral reef management, the project will draw upon the relatively up-to-date reports and analyses available.

The critical elements in these tasks will be the raising of awareness and building of capacity to enable Oman's resource planners, managers and decision makers to develop a new framework for biodiversity conservation that moves biodiversity into the mainstream of development decision making by involving representatives from different parts of Government, the private sector and local communities.

ANNEX 2

- 1992: Coastal Zone Management Plan (MRME/IUCN).
- 1993: Draft National Conservation Strategy (MRME).
- 1994: Guide to the Convention on Biological Diversity (IUCN).
- 1995: Guidelines for preparing National Biodiversity Planning (WRI/IUCN/UNEP).
- 1996: Coral Reef Management Plan

سلطنة عمان
 Ministry of Regional
 Municipalities & Environment
 Muscat

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 وزارة البلديات الإقليمية والبيئة
 مسقط

MRME 18- 41404/96

Ref. :

16/11/1996

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After Compliments,

Sub : **ENABLING BIODIVERSITY PROJECT - OMAN**

Kindly be informed that the Government of the Sultanate of Oman would like to request UNDP'S assistance in securing GEF funding for a project addressing biodiversity enabling activities, thereby enabling the Government of the Sultanate of Oman to respond to its obligations under the Biodiversity Convention. For your reference, please find attached the project proposal.

It would be appreciated if necessary action could be taken on this regard.

Best regards.


 Mahmood Bin Mohammed Talib Al-Zakwani
 Director of International Relations



C.C. To :

- Mr. Francis Parakatil (IUCN)
- Mr. Achim Steiner (IUCN)