

EGYPT

Development of community-based eco-tourism

The government of Egypt is promoting Bedouin-managed tourism enterprises in pristine wilderness areas in protected areas. Conservation and sustainable tourism in St. Katherine Protectorate is intended to provide a model for how to conserve natural and cultural resources and provide benefits to local communities while also enhancing tourism quality. The programme includes the reconstruction of a Bedouin habitation into an eco-lodge, establishing nature trails, revitalizing traditional craft skills, constructing a visitor centre, publishing tourist maps and nature guidebooks.

The lodge was designed in the vernacular style and built by local Bedouin artisans using local materials. It operates on the principle of minimal environmental impact and offers very basic facilities - it has waterless composting toilets and the showers are water efficient and solar heated. A dam has been built upstream to recharge groundwater supplies. Grey waste water is filtered through a 'fat' trap and then used to irrigate Bedouin gardens. Guests bring their own bedding, so no laundry is done on site, and firewood comes from a sustainable source.

Interconnected trekking routes and various itineraries have been created. It is encouraged that local management and implementation be based on *orfi* tradition (customary law). The income generation programme, based on local stakeholder participation, redistributes entry fees for the Protectorate by promoting eco-tourism businesses via training and technical support, thus providing local incentives to conserve the wildlife base of these revenues, and by paying community guards who represent local communities, liaise between management units and communities and support monitoring, research and eco-tourism in their region.

The traditions and indigenous knowledge and customary skills of local people have become central to the development and management of the St. Katherine Protectorate. The craft programme was initiated in the belief that the maintenance of cultural diversity and the conservation of biological diversity are interconnected, and that biodiversity can be conserved through a broader effort to promote and sustain human welfare and culture. The Bedouin Craft programme was started in 1997 to assist in particular women to preserve, develop and market traditional skills in order to generate income. In 2002, a Bedouin owned company (Fansina) was established to produce and commercialize Bedouin crafts involving over 400 Bedouin women.

The Medicinal Plants Conservation Project (MPCP) component was initiated in 2007 to strengthen the in situ conservation management of medicinal and aromatic plants (MAP).

Impact on biodiversity

Local communities have realised that the protected area is of great interest to visitors. They are now interested and empowered to maintain and protect the area by reporting violations and using peer pressure to prevent degrading activities. The major opinion leader in the community is also a Protectorate Community Guard who helps enforce regulations and is a conduit between the Protectorate management and the community.

Replicability

The government of Egypt has provided an enabling environment and technical support to provide positive incentives to set up biodiversity and cultural based businesses and to protect the ecosystems on which these businesses are based.

Lessons learned

The effective integration between tourism, local economic development and protected area management, which is the basis for nature-based tourism, can direct economic benefits to remote rural areas and increase incentives for conservation in state protected lands.

Conservation projects can help to catalyze associated rural development activities by other agencies.

It is essential to involve and benefit local people at an early stage in the process. Community participation and support for conservation activities requires time.

The traditional responsibility of local people as the resource managers in the area should be acknowledged and built upon.

Inputs and benefits have to be tangible and be sustained to gain the trust and confidence of local people. This should also extend to the long-term involvement and accountability of individual rangers and managers.

Sources: Egypt (2009); Gehiny, A. T. (2010).