

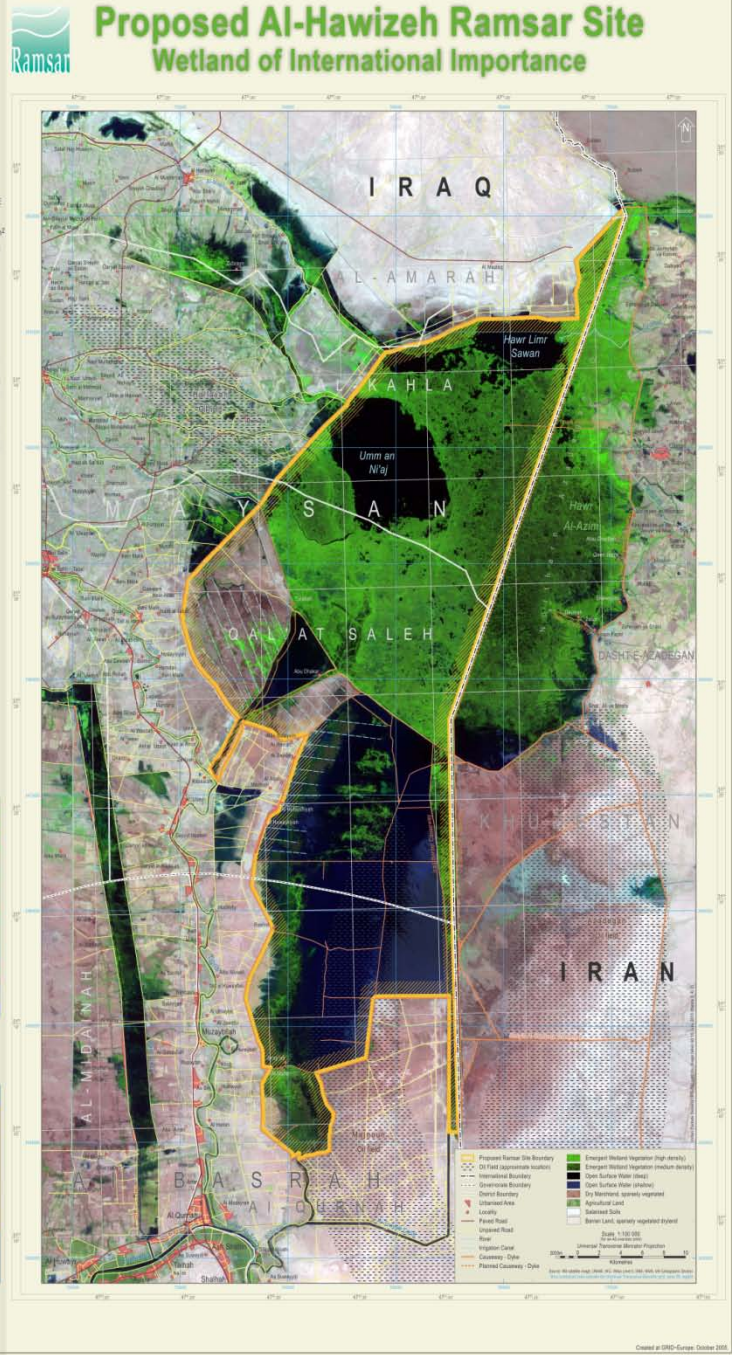
NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR WETLANDS IN IRAQ



Name of Proposed Ramsar Site: Hawr Al-Hawzieh
Country: Republic of Iraq
Geographic Coordinates: centered on 31°25'N, 47°38'E
Governorate: Maysan and Al-Basrah
Area of Proposed Ramsar Site: 137,700 ha or 1,377 km²
Estimated total pre-drainage area of Al-Hawzieh (1973): 243,500 ha or 2,435 km² (Iraq part only, excluding Iran)
Elevation: lowest point -13 m, highest point 18 m

Wetland Type: Permanent and seasonal freshwater to brackish marshes dominated by *Phragmites* reed beds and open sheets of shallow waters.

The Al-Hawzieh marshes are an integral part of the Mesopotamian marshland complex centered at the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. A transboundary wetland, Al-Hawzieh is mainly (circa 75-80%) located in Iraq and partly extends into the Islamic Republic of Iran where it is known as a Hawr Al-Azim. Representing the only significant area to have survived recent drainage actions and the most intact part of the original Mesopotamian system, Al-Hawzieh is a biodiversity reservoir area of priority conservation.



Summary of Wetlands Situation

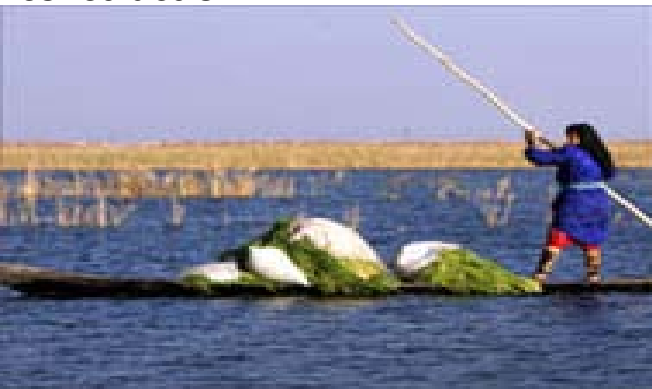
The wetlands in the middle and lower basins of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in Iraq were, until recently at least, much the most extensive wetland ecosystems in the Middle East. In their lower courses, these two great rivers have created a vast network of wetlands, the Mesopotamian Marshes, covering about 15000 sq km.

Much the largest wetlands within this complex are: (a) the Haur Al Hammar and its associated marshes (3500 sq km) south of the Euphrates; (b) the Central Marshes (3000 sq km) a vast complex of permanent lakes and marshes north of the Euphrates and west of the Tigris; and (c) Haur Al Hawizeh and its associated marshes (2200 sq km) extending east from the Tigris into neighboring Iran. These wetlands eventually drain southeastwards into the Shatt Al Arab waterway.

Other important natural wetlands in central Iraq include two large brackish to saline lakes, Shari Lake to the east of the Tigris north of Samarra, and Haur Al Shuaicha on the plains to the east of the Tigris southeast of Baghdad. A smaller saline lake, Sawa Lake, in the desert about 25 km west of Samawa, is of interest because of its unusual physicochemical properties. This lake is apparently fed by underground seepage from as far north as Razazah, and has no surface outlet.

Established reservoirs known to be of important for wildlife include Samarra Lake on the Tigris and Hindyia Barrage on the Euphrates.

Several huge dams have been constructed on the major rivers in recent years, while others are still under construction.



In the region of west Baghdad in central Iraq, three large saline depressions have been converted into huge water storage basins for flood relief. Lake Tharthar, Lake Habbaniya and Lake Razaza (Bahr Al Milh). All three of these lakes support major fisheries and of considerable importance for migratory waterfowl. Other significant wetlands in this region include large areas of semi-arid plains and irrigated arable land subject to winter flooding, notably the Attariya Plains east of Baghdad, the Al Musayyib area south of Baghdad, and Haur Ibn Najim to the southeast.

No measures had been taken by former Iraqi regime to conserve the wetlands ecosystems, and in general it gives low priority to nature conservation

At the beginning Of 1980s, that regime began implementing an intensive system of drainage and water diversion structures that dried over 90% of the southern marshes .

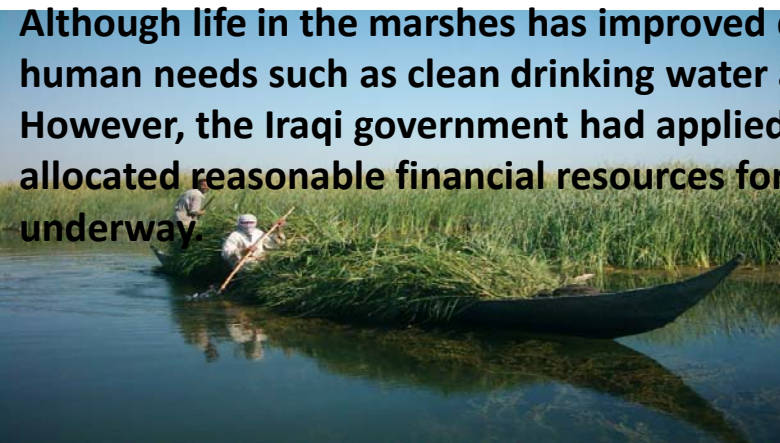
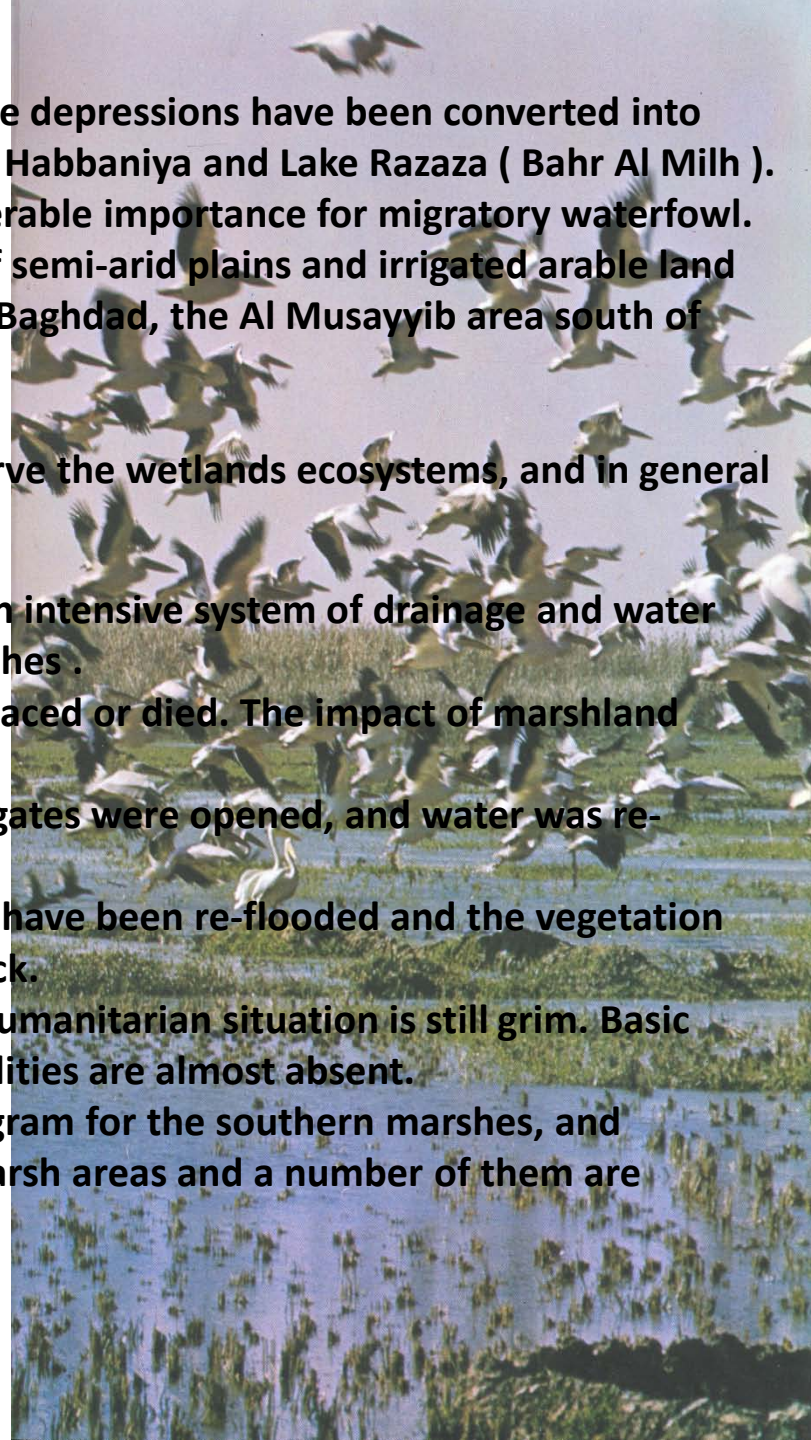
It is estimated that more than half a million people were displaced or died. The impact of marshland desiccation on wildlife was devastating.

In march 2003, the first embankments were breached, sluice gates were opened, and water was re-directed back to the marshlands.

Over all, by October 2005, 40% of the permanent marshlands have been re-flooded and the vegetation has taken root. The former marsh dwellers started coming back.

Although life in the marshes has improved dramatically, the humanitarian situation is still grim. Basic human needs such as clean drinking water and sanitation facilities are almost absent.

However, the Iraqi government had applied a restoration program for the southern marshes, and allocated reasonable financial resources for projects in the marsh areas and a number of them are underway.



What did draining of the Marshes achieve?

- Destructive impact on millions of peoples
- Displacement and death of people
- Impoverishment and hunger
- Diseases and contamination
- Family breakup
- Destructive impact on biodiversity
- Sever negative impact on flood management
- Destruction of significant cultural heritage

Why are the marshes Important?



- Enormous economic resource
 - 60% of fish catch
 - 40% of dairy product
- The only available option for a decent life for the local population
- Unique natural & hydrologic formation
- Important climatic factor
- Cultural & historical heritage
- Unique way of life
- Home for massive & divers species

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR WETLANDS IN IRAQ

Vision

The wetlands ecosystem restored, to the maximum extent possible and developing technical solutions to support local population, biodiversity and the environment.

Objective

To achieve effective conservation of the Iraqi wetlands and to ensure that the Water Resources management strategies are based on ecological sustainability and have sound environmental and institutional components.

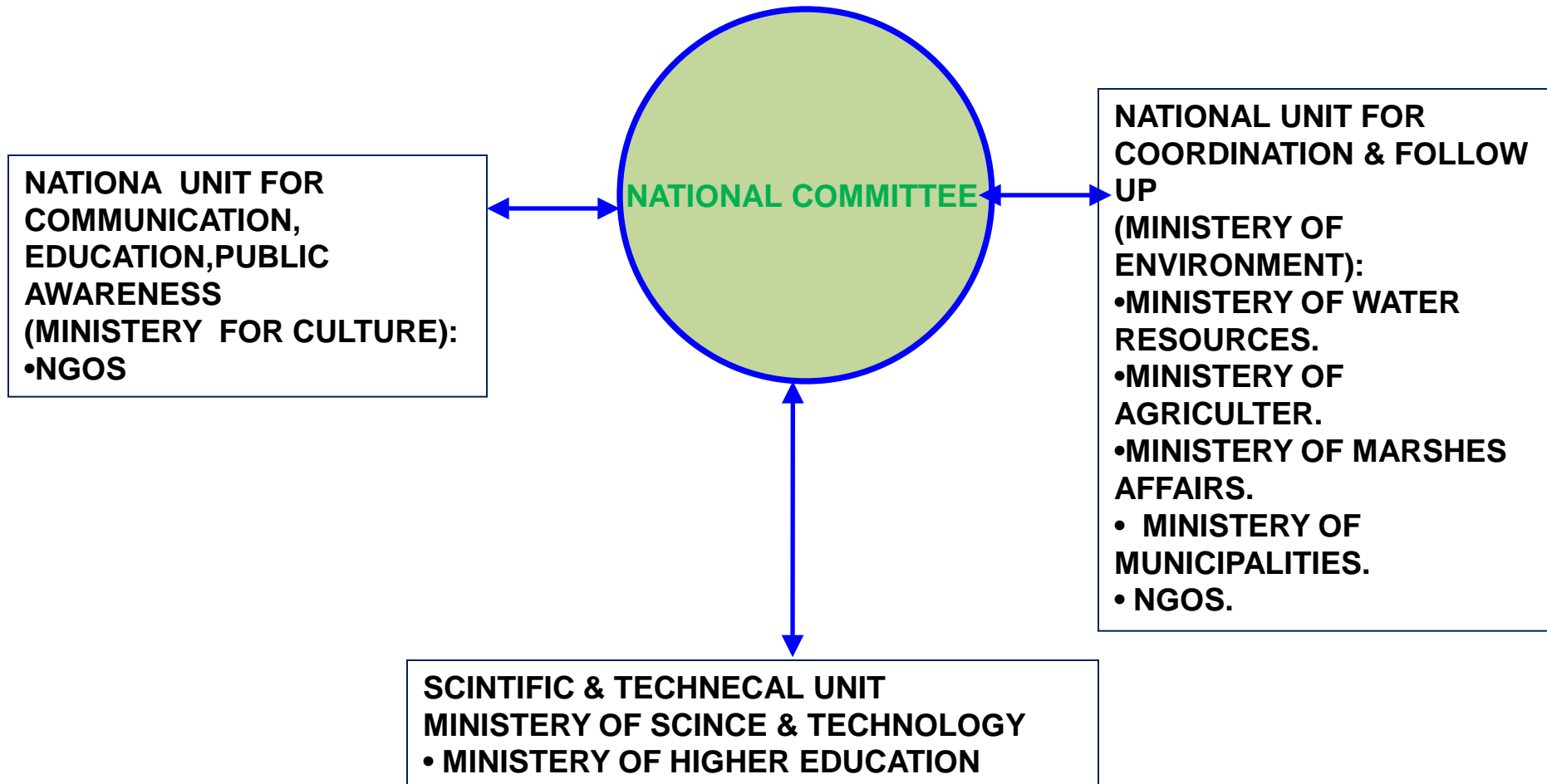
Strategic Plan

- The conservation is the responsibility of the NCWI and it is a priority issue;
- The protection of environmental, ecological and cultural heritage of the wetlands;
- Recognition of the regional and international significance of the wetlands;
- Recognition of the principles of ESD in the restoration of the wetlands and economic development in the area.
- Welcoming international cooperation in the restoration process;
- The restoration of the wetlands is an integral part of overall, improved management of Iraqi water systems.



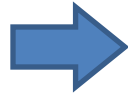
- Agreement on international water sharing must recognize the need for water to

The framework of coordination with other related national units



The Major Challenges

1. Technical Challenges



- Strategic objectives
- Water availability and allocation (quality & quantity)
- Operational issues
- Balancing competing demands
- Capacity development

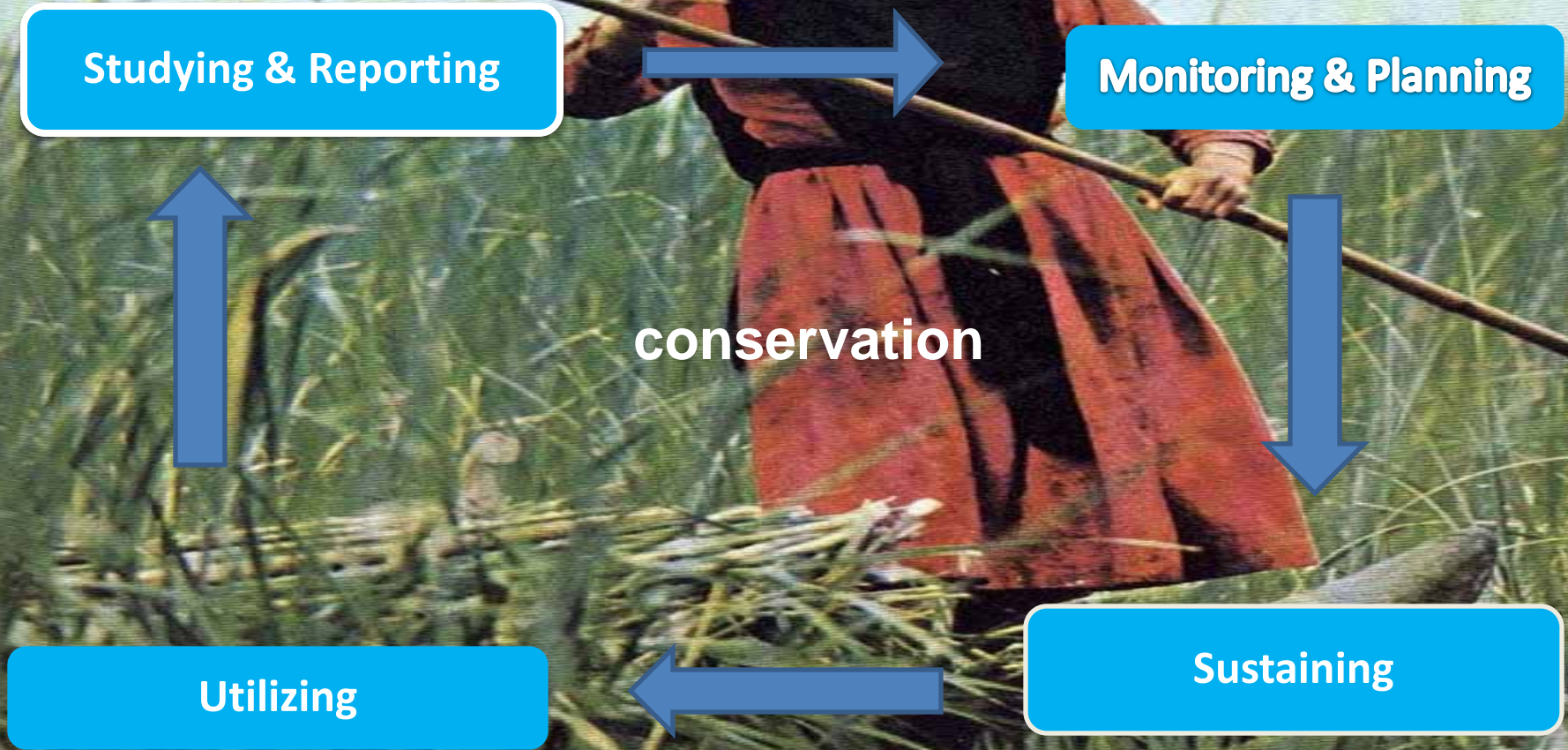
2. Institutional Challenges



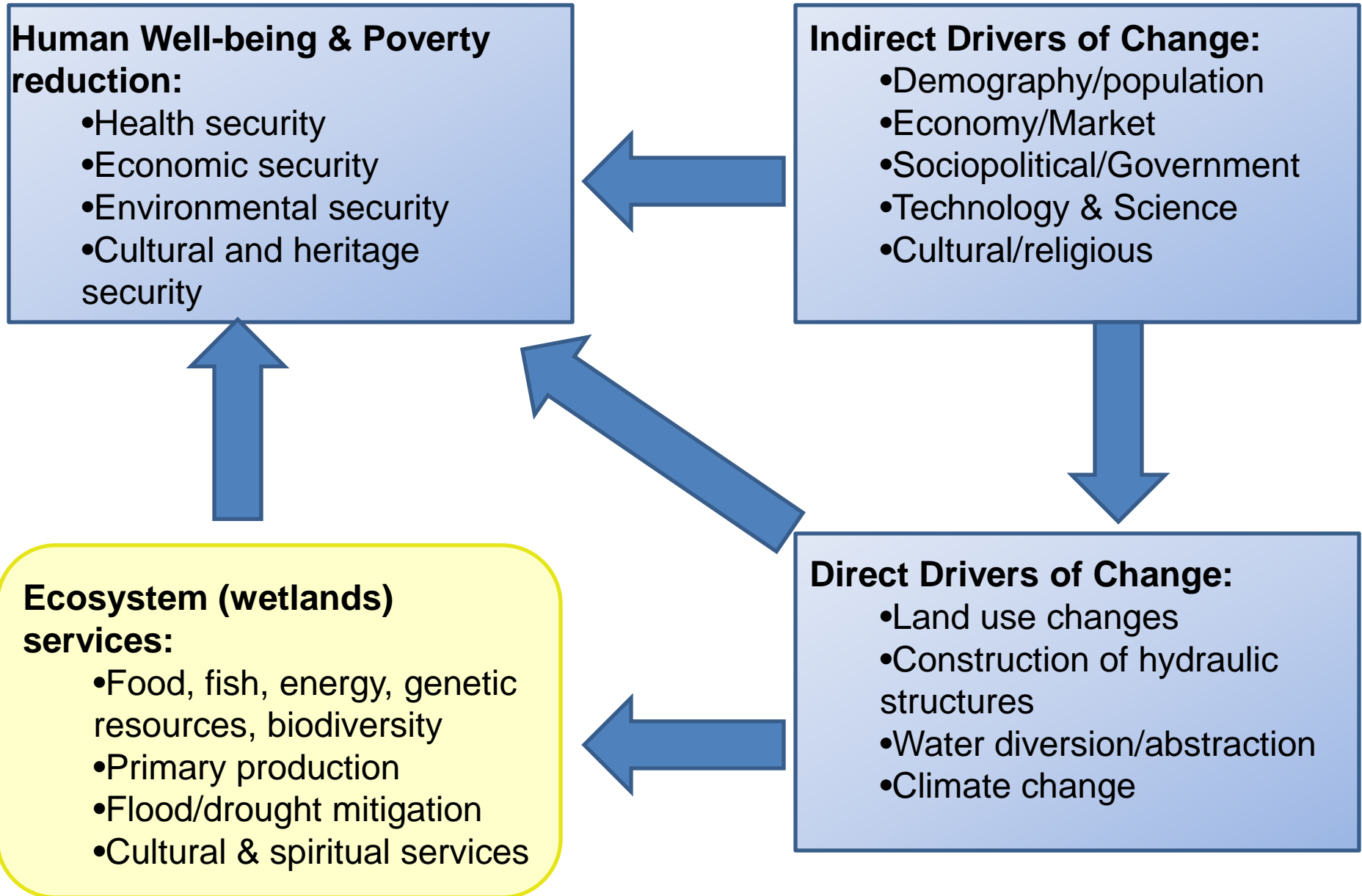
- Regulation and governance (who is responsible and what authority)
- Implementing agency?
- National wetlands policy
- Framework for stakeholders coordination

The Way Ahead

1. Conservation Processes



2. The Wise Use of the wetlands



3. IWRM

Managing water resources in a harmonious and environmentally sustainable way by uniting stakeholders in planning and decision making while accounting for the following factors:

- **Increased demands due to population growth,**
- **Economic development,**
- **Environmental conservation,**
- **changing in cultural and economic value of water**
- **Climate change**
- **Other competing demands**

4. Development Projects



THANKS FOR LISTENING