



CONVENTION ON WETLANDS

(Ramsar, Iran, 1971)

**Asia Regional Workshop on Scientific and Technical Support
for Implementation of the Ramsar Convention**

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Briefing Note for agenda item 17

Poverty Eradication – Guidance and Case Studies

Working Session 8: Wetlands and Poverty Eradication–Guidance and Case Studies

Friday 11 October, 13.30-14.40

Background

This theme under the Ramsar Convention recognizes that for many countries poverty eradication is a major policy priority, especially in relation to achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); that Ramsar has long stressed the fact that many people depend directly or indirectly on wetlands and their services and benefits for their livelihoods and well-being; and that the wise use¹ of wetlands can contribute to poverty eradication.

The need for a balance between maintaining ecosystems and meeting human needs is acute in the case of wetlands. While it is widely recognized that wetlands deliver a wide range of services vital for human well-being, and that wetland ecosystem services form an integral part of the livelihood strategies of wetland-dependent communities, poverty can often result in interventions that impact upon wetlands. These impacts can be both direct (over-exploitation of a natural resource that reduces livelihood options; absence of sanitation, which forces people to use wetlands for waste disposal) and indirect (destructive agricultural practices in the catchment leading to changes in wetland sedimentation). Moreover, where poverty exists, it is possible for a vicious circle to develop, whereby poverty impacts upon the ecological character² of wetlands to the extent that the potential for wetlands to deliver their ecosystem services is degraded or even lost.

Wetland losses tend to be more rapid where human populations are increasing and where pressure for economic development is greatest. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MEA) predicts that the continued loss and degradation of wetlands will result in further reduction in human well-being, especially for poorer people in less developed countries where alternate livelihoods are not readily available. Achieving the MDGs such as the eradication of poverty, therefore, partly depends on maintaining or enhancing wetland ecosystem services, and that to do so, a cross-sectoral focus is urgently needed from policy and decision-makers that emphasizes securing wetland ecosystems and their services in the context of achieving sustainable development and improving human well-being. Approaches that integrate both conservation and development objectives are thus urgently needed as expressed in the [Ramsar Resolution IX.14](#) on Wetlands and Poverty Reduction (2005), [Resolution X.28](#) on Wetlands and Poverty Eradication (2008) and the subsequent [Ramsar Resolution XI.13](#) that proposes An Integrated Framework for linking wetland conservation and wise use with poverty eradication (2012).

[Ramsar Resolution IX.14](#) on Wetlands and Poverty Reduction (2005) urged Contracting Parties and other governments to take action to contribute to poverty reduction, highlighting the importance of access to resources, ecological sustainability, governance and economics. It went on to stress the central role of local communities and linking wetland management and restoration with poverty reduction in this work through the need to: review and improve existing financing mechanisms for wetland management to help address poverty reduction; develop new ideas such as local agreements with wetland communities to enable the maintenance of ecosystem services; ensure that gender equality and sensitivity to local communities are taken into account in sustainable wetland management strategies;

¹ Wise use is “the maintenance of ecological character, achieved through the implementation of ecosystem approaches, within the context of sustainable development” ([Ramsar Resolution IX.1](#) Annex A, 2005).

² Ecological character is the combination of the ecosystem components, processes and benefits/services that characterize the wetland at a given point in time ([Ramsar Resolution IX.1](#) Annex A, 2005).

raise awareness of the self-perpetuating cycles that result from the relationship between wetland degradation and poverty; give priority or support to the conservation and wise use of water and wetlands in national poverty reduction strategy papers, IWRM and other policies; and create new partnerships between local communities, developers and conservationists to ensure that local perspectives are included and that existing sustainable livelihood strategies are respected.

[Resolution X.28](#) (2008) on Wetlands and Poverty Eradication encouraged Contracting Parties to identify ways and means of further implementing the initial framework for action on wetlands and poverty reduction adopted in [Resolution IX.14](#) (2005), and particularly action to eradicate poverty amongst communities living in and around Ramsar sites, and to report on their successes, challenges, constraints and opportunities in achieving action on integrating wetland conservation and poverty eradication, including on the trade-offs that are often necessary in such implementation. The Resolution also requested the Scientific and Technical Review Panel (STRP) to develop specific guidance for Contracting Parties to support the implementation of those Resolutions.

[Resolution XI.13](#) (2012) introduced an Integrated Framework for linking wetland conservation and wise use with poverty eradication, as a tool for governments, wetland management authorities and stakeholders to assess wetland ecosystem services and livelihoods inter-linkages at multiple scales. It urged Contracting Parties to make use of the Framework, in their assessments of the inter-linkages between poverty and the wise use of wetlands, and to include such assessments in the development of site-based management planning to promote wise use and maintenance of the ecological character of wetlands. It also encouraged Contracting Parties to utilize this framework as a means of furthering cooperation and collaboration with development agencies to address poverty issues within wetlands in their decision-making and their activities that relate to the delivery of the wise use of wetlands.

The impact of conservation/development interventions on wise use (maintaining ecological character) and poverty eradication may have a number of potential outcomes. In a win-win situation, a policy change or directive may lift people out of poverty and also maintain good ecological character. Conversely, a policy change that triggers deterioration in ecological character beyond the limit of acceptable change and pushes communities into poverty would be considered a “no-go” zone. Between these two options there is a range of scenarios which deliver one of the two objectives at the cost of the other, thereby indicating that tradeoffs have to be made. It is in these zones that a systematic assessment of wetland-poverty inter-linkages becomes highly relevant, as does developing policy options that ensure optimal achievement of both objectives - poverty eradication and maintenance of ecological character.

Feedback requested from participants

Based on the above background, during this Working Session, we are interested in hearing from you about the following:

1. Policies and Programmes linking wetland conservation and wise use with poverty eradication:
 - To promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands together with poverty eradication, what are the main policies and programmes in your country that need to be targeted? (i.e., policies and programmes linked to poverty eradication and others that may be of relevance, either directly or indirectly);
 - What are the types of strategies that countries have already adopted to address these issues and what are your views on how these have worked?
2. Case studies on wetlands wise use and poverty eradication inter-linkages:

We are interested in learning from you about wetland case studies from your country (or others) on best practices that address poverty eradication in association with wetlands wise use. This may

include for example how wetland degradation affects people's livelihoods and how maintenance or restoration of the ecological character of wetlands can contribute to poverty alleviation.

Some of the broad criteria that the wetland case studies should possess are (noting that we do not expect that each case study will show all the criteria):

1. Integration of wetlands conservation and poverty eradication/reduction of communities living within or adjacent to the site.
2. Existence of natural resource-based livelihood activities (the project/initiative should not focus entirely on the conservation needs, but should also involve the livelihood activities linked to the wetland).
3. Size of the population dependent on wetlands (examples of high and low dependencies to look at their different implications).
4. Type of wetland – a range of wetland types to cover diverse ecological conditions.
5. Size of wetland (examples of small and large wetlands to look at their implications).
6. Land tenure – state, communal, private landownership (examples of each will broaden the lessons in best practices in terms of their relevance).
7. Legal status – Protected Area (PA) versus non-PA.
8. Management – By the State, the community, private management or a combination.
9. Project duration – 1-2 years, 5-10 or more years (examples of short and longer initiatives will help explore the role of time in understanding change processes).
10. Rural – urban setting (at least one example of an urban wetland is desired).
11. Geographic location – focus mainly in developing country contexts.

Some questions to think about when examining the case studies:

- Main issues facing the wetland and their causes
- Main strategies used by the project/initiative and why those were chosen
- Main results, both in terms of the wetland as well as local people
- Things that worked and things that did not work well and why
- Conclusions we can draw from the above, e.g.
 - The role of methodology used in terms of how context was understood and interventions formed and implemented
 - Trade-offs between good ecological character of the wetland and human well-being – what were these and what factors influenced how decisions were made on these trade-offs?
 - Does the type and size of the wetland influence its impact on poverty reduction? How does this and other factors influence the degree to which a wetland can support poverty reduction without compromising its own integrity?
 - What was the role of externalities such as national/regional policies, land use patterns outside (e.g. upstream) of the wetland area in shaping the impact of the project. To what extent was it able to address these externalities?

Background documents

1. Ramsar Resolution XI.13: An Integrated Framework for linking wetland conservation and wise use with poverty eradication. <http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/cop11/res/cop11-res13-e.pdf>.
2. Resolution X.28: Wetlands and poverty eradication. http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/res/key_res_x_28_e.pdf
3. Ramsar Resolution IX.14: Wetlands and poverty reduction. http://www.ramsar.org/pdf/res/key_res_ix_14_e.pdf.