

Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) Process Framework for Involuntary Restrictions

Project title: Rehabilitation of the Sweimeh Eco-Park
Implementing agency: Sweimeh Association Charity
Donor: Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)

Overall Context

Since early 2011, the Development Zones Company (DZC) and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature launched a joint partnership for the development and conservation of the Dead Sea Development Zones though with the primary aim to mainstream the ecosystems management principles into the current development master plan for the area.

The cooperation program includes building on each organization's core competency to support the effective and successful implementation of the master plan though which RSCN would provide its technical know-how and institutional capacity to integrated biodiversity conservation on the planning and implementation of the master plan while the Development Zones Company would adopt more ecosystem oriented approaches to planning and management of development programs and initiatives.

The Sweimeh Eco-Park (SEP) is an integral part of the land designated by the government of Jordan to the Development and Free Zones Commission and is managed by the Jordan Development Zones Company as part of Dead Sea Development Zone. RSCN involvement is limited to specific land management aspects in SEP according to the set plans and initiatives agreed by both parties.

The ecosystem planning and development of the SEP represents a key component of the cooperation framework and aim at:

- Ensuring the sustainability of the ecological and landscape integrity of the Eco-park as one of the core natural assets of the development zone.
- Promote the sustainable use of the Eco-park in line with the potential restoration and rehabilitation based on its historic status.
- Contribute to the site tourism offering and product diversification as part of the economic development of the region as a whole.

In implementing the ecosystem based approach for SEP, RSCN identified the Sweimeh Charity Society (SCS) as main local community partner and representative in the integrated management approach adopted for the area. The role of SCS is to ensure that the development process addressed the needs and priorities of the local communities of the area and facilitate the program partners' access to local traditional knowledge and local engagement in the planning, management and monitoring of the tourism centered development program of the Dead Sea zone in general and the Sep in particular.

The Project Description

The Rehabilitation of the Sweimeh Eco-Park project falls under the CEFP strategic direction 3 which state “Improve the conservation and protection status of 44 priority key biodiversity areas”. This strategic direction has three themes which will all be tackled by the project: (i) Establish new protected areas and promote improved management of existing protected areas by developing and implementing sustainable management plans; (ii) Develop financial mechanisms that support protected areas while enhancing sustainable livelihood and promoting community management of priority key biodiversity areas; and (iii) Raise awareness of the importance of priority key biodiversity areas, including those that have irreplaceable plant and marine biodiversity.

This rehabilitation of the Sweimeh Eco-Park (SEP) is an integral component of the overall master planning framework adopted for the Dead Sea region implemented by the Government of Jordan (GOJ) represented by the Development Zones Company (DZC). The vision of the master plan is to enhance the development of the Dead Sea Area as a model for sustainable and integrated planning and management of natural resources represented by one of Jordan prime iconic sites, the Dead Sea. The master plan was developed using a balanced approach for land use planning taking in consideration the natural and cultural heritage components of the target area as a prime factor leading the development scenarios. The total area targeted is a about 4,000 ha, 2,800 of which were designated as a no development areas due to their ecological sensitivities and other physical and engineering limitations.

The SEP was identified by the master planning process as an area of special economic and ecological significance. Economically, it represents “the green backyard” of the investment activities anticipated in the area represented by the various levels of temporary and permanent visitors’ infrastructure and facilities. Ecologically, the SEP represent the primary locality for the conservation and protection of several key iconic species of birds and plants which are endemic to and representative of the Dead Sea Region. This includes the iconic Dead Sea Sparrow, the primary species targeted in SEP.

More specifically the project aim at contributing to the long term sustainable tourism development of SEP as an integral part of wider master planning program through the rehabilitation of the relic ecosystem of the Tamarix Vegetation and its associated bird population of the iconic Dead Sea Sparrow and other avifauna. The expected results of the project include:

- Developing and enforcing an biodiversity sensitive zoning plan for the SEP
- Developing the local community capacities on Protected Areas management, responsible tourism and sustainable livelihoods.
- The identification of a set of tourism based and local community oriented alternative socioeconomic initiatives as a trade-off for any resource use restrictions and management controls.
- The adoption of the a participative governance arrangement which includes local communities and facilitates their access to information and their participation in decision making

The Policy, Legal, and Administrative Framework

The legal and administrative framework relevant to SEP is not too distinctive from the overall national frameworks adopted for other development areas in Jordan. The following national legal requirements have been identified so far:

Effective laws relevant to SEP

- The Development Zones Law no (2) for the year 2008
- Environment Protection Law No. (52) for the year 2006
- Water Authority Law No. 18 for the year 1988
- Ministry of Agriculture Law No. 44 for the year 2002
- Natural resources Authority Laws 2002
- Public Health Law No. 47 for the year 2008
- Civil Defense Law No. (18) for the year 1999
- Traffic Law No. (49) for the year 2008
- Labor Law No. (8) for the year 1996
- Anti-Trafficking Law No. (9) of the year 2009
- Antiquities Law No. (21) for the year 1988

Effective regulations relevant to SEP

- The DZC planning and infrastructure development bylaw for the year 2012
- Air Quality Protection Regulation No. 28 of the year 2005
- Soil Protection Law No. 25 of the year 2005
- Regulation No. 24 of the year for the Management of Hazardous and Dangerous Materials
- Regulation No. 27 for the year 2005 for the Management of Solid Waste
- Underground Water Regulation No. 85 of 2002

Other legislations

Other policies, guidelines and procedures requested to be addressed for international organizations funded projects are mostly:

- The Ministry of Environment requirements;
- International Finance Corporation (IFC) requirements that include:
 - Environmental, Health and Safety general guidelines
 - Environmental, Health and Safety Guidelines for Water and Sanitation
 - Performance Standards on Social and Environmental sustainability
 - World Bank Operational Policy 4.01 – Environmental Assessment
 - World Bank Operational Policy 4.12 – Involuntary resettlement

Environmental baseline

Location

The Sweimeh Eco-Park site (N 31°50', E 35°35') is located around 40 km south-west of the capital city of Amman, along the northern-most shores of the Dead Sea. The site includes an extensive, natural Tamarix woodland west of Dead Sea highway. The site is about 50 ha in size and comprises a typical area representing the northern shores of the Dead Sea bordering the Iconic Jordan River to the west.

Climate and Biogeography

Lying on the bottom of the rift valley, at the lowest point of Earth (400 plus m b.s.l.), the site enjoys a rather hot and arid Mediterranean climate with warm and slightly wet winters and very hot, dry summers. The average annual precipitation, falling mainly between November and March, is around 50-90 mm. The annual mean temperature is 24°C, while absolute extreme temperatures recorded at the site are 5 °C and 45 °C. The average annual evaporation rate is around 1550mm.

The shores of the Dead Sea and most of the rift valley in Jordan are part of the Sudanian penetration zone. Although plant species of other bio-geographical zones or region may be common (namely Saharo-Arabian and Irano-Turanian), this zone owes its name to the existence of a few species of African origins. However, the vegetation of the site essentially consists of few pluri-regional, halophyte species (e.g. Tamarix and Juncus) which occur in various sites with similar salt marsh conditions and are not restricted to one bio-geographical zone.

Hydrology

The Jordan Rift Valley is a topographic low acting as the drainage basin for groundwater originating both from the eastern and the western mountain aquifers bordering the Rift basin as well as from ephemeral streams and floods generated in the surrounding mountains (Flexer, Guttman, Haddad, Hötzl, Rosenthal 2009).

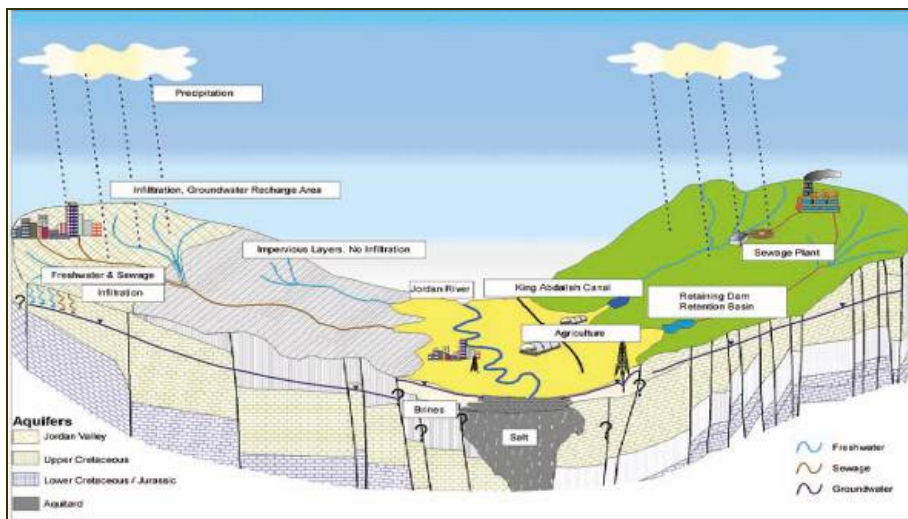


Figure: Main components of the hydrogeological system in the lower Jordan

There are numerous small fresh-water springs emerging at the Tamarix woodland of the northern Dead Sea shore, which are important for the marshy conditions that used to prevail at the site until recently degradation took place during the last decade.

Environmental impacts

The rehabilitation of the Sweimeh Eco-Park is considered as an ecological restoration initiatives with many anticipated positive environmental impacts. The project is foreseen to contribute to the restoration of the niche ecosystem supporting the relic population of the Dead Sea Sparrow in one of its last refuge areas in the whole of the rift valley.

Specifically, the rehabilitation of the SEP, will have the follow key environmental impacts of the SEP

- Will contribute to the conservation of the Sweimeh-Maghtas Important Bird Area (IBA): This entails high value for migratory birds' species as well as holding the presence of threatened bird's species (e.g. Dead Sea Sparrow)
- Will support the protection of the breeding population of the Dead Sea Sparrow; *Passer moabiticus*: a restricted range species to the *tamarix* vegetation cover in Jordan and its status is threatened by the removal of this vegetation type.
- Will enhance the conservation of the *tamarix* vegetation cover: this vegetation cover is considered the most threatened in the Dead Sea area of Jordan due to the high investment vision, woodcutting activities, and the presence of invasive alien species such as *Prosopis juliflora*.
- Will contribute to the rehabilitation of an important niche habitat for large carnivore's species: this area provides carnivores species such as Jackal and Red Fox with feeding, resting, breeding source as well as Wadis present in the area acts as natural corridors.

In contrast, the rehabilitation process might have some indirect environmental impacts resulting from the relocation of some of the local grazing activities which could result in increasing the pressure on other surrounding grazing areas. To address this, the project plans to adopt an *ex-situ* fodder collection scheme in cooperation with SCS through the implementation of "the cut and carry" method to deliver excess vegetation to local users from the Eco-Park to be utilized outside. Also, the project aims to develop local capacities in the engagement in the tourism sector through vocation training and job opportunities development as a tradeoff mechanism to compensate for resource use loses and impacts on local residents. Furthermore, the project has developed a scheme for alternative fodder and fire wood production through the harvesting of the invasive *Prosopis* vegetation which would results in a win-win situation from ecological and socioeconomic points of view.

Finally, the process framework proposed for adoption by the project would provide the participative planning and management framework needed to ensure the implementation of an integrated approach addressing all development aspects of ecology conservation, social and economic development under one balance and effective approach.