

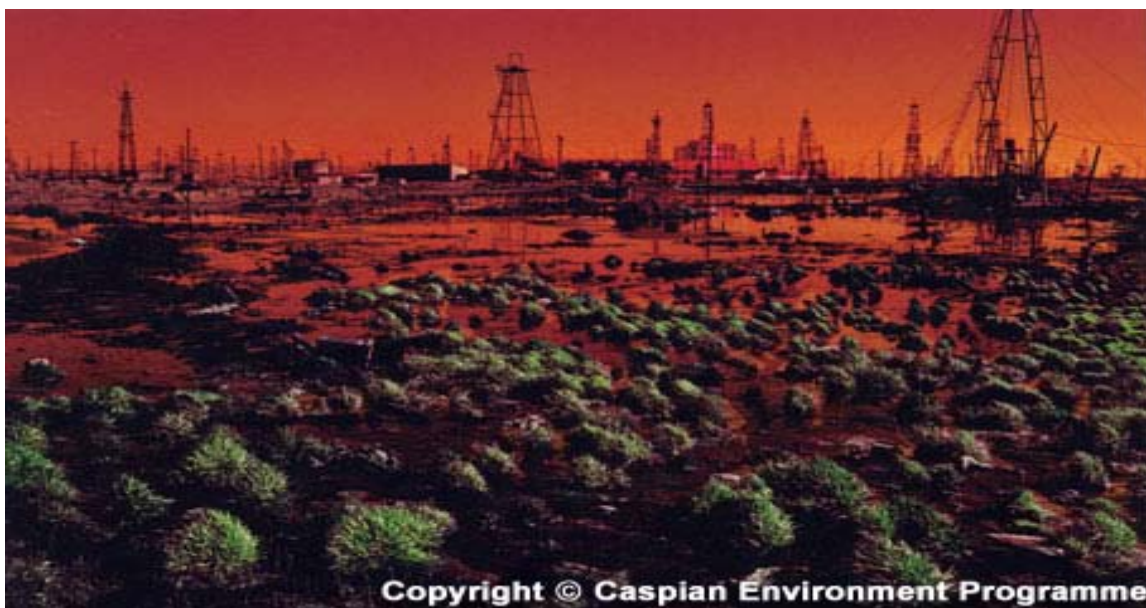


# INTERNATIONAL WATERS EXPERIENCE NOTES

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## Leveraging Local Actions Through Matched Small Grants and the Caspian Concern Groups



**Abstract:** This note takes a glance at the Caspian Sea project's small grants programme. One of the project's objectives was to achieve tangible environmental improvements in priority areas by implementation of small-scale investments supported by a Small Matched Grants Programme (MSGP). The project faced an issue of how to design a program that could assist in the identification, partial finance and implementation of small investment projects that address a national priority, that have a positive and transboundary impact or address a common problem within one of the four major areas of environmental concern as indicated in the Strategic Action Programme (SAP), and are socially and economically beneficial. Throughout the MSGP, grants worth almost US\$1.3 million were disbursed to 28 projects, 16 in phase I and 12 in phase II. The region considers the MSGP a success; an initiative that helps the needy communities and leaves a real impact on the ground. Further replication should consider the following issues: grantee solvency, bureaucratic requirements, support to concern groups, thinner matching requirements and mixing grants with loans. The programme's significance lies in its being action-targeted; mobilizing additional resources and engaging stakeholders in project work.

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# Leveraging Local Actions Through Matched Small Grants and Caspian Concern Groups

Experience of the GEF sponsored

## “Towards a Convention and Action Programme for the Protection of the Caspian Sea Environment (CEPSAP)”

GEF Project ID: 1618

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The CEPSAP represented the second phase of the GEF support to the Caspian Environment Programme (CEP). The CEP is an intergovernmental environment programme which was established in 1998 by the five Caspian littoral countries, namely Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Iran, with substantive support from the Programme's international partners namely the GEF, European Union, World Bank, UNDP and UNEP. The programme maintains the overarching goal of 'environmentally sustainable development and management of the Caspian environment for future generations'.

CEPSAP built on the achievements of the first phase of the GEF's support to the CEP through 2004. These included establishing and fostering a constructive environmental management and cooperation dialogue through the establishment of a regional management structure (with its linchpin the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention)); the diagnostic analytical work manifested by the Caspian Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA), National Caspian Action Plans (NCAPs) and the Strategic Action Programme (SAP), built on considerable scientific and analytical work, and finally by resource mobilization actions. These actions occurred through development of fundable investment project ideas as well as by the Matched Small Grants Programme (MSGP).

The CEPSAP's objectives were to commence implementation of the SAP in three priority areas (Biodiversity, Invasive Species and Persistent Toxic Substances); to continue with specific capacity building measures to ensure a regionally owed CEP coordination mechanism capable of full implementation of the SAP and regional coordination of the NCAPs; to strengthen the environmental legal and policy

frameworks operating at the regional and the national levels and where necessary improve implementation and compliance of those frameworks and finally, to achieve tangible environmental improvements in SAP priority areas by implementation of small-scale investments supported by a Small Matched Grants Programme (MSGP). The CEPSAP is now complete having completed delivered all its intended outputs in a satisfactory manner.

GEF support to the CEP in phases I and II amounted to US\$14.5 million and leveraged an additional \$35.7 million in co-financing<sup>1</sup>. Traditional national partners in the CEP have been the highest level of the environmental ministries and agencies as supported by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. UNOPS internationally executed both phases. The CEP has been a showcase for international agencies, highlighting cooperation where UNDP, UNEP, World Bank and EU have seen eye to eye on most issues.

The GEF has now positively considered a third and final tranche of support to the Caspian Sea, which will see full ownership of the regional environmental cooperation and management being assumed by the countries through a Convention Secretariat delivering on the country priorities as reflected in the Convention Strategic Action Plan.

### THE EXPERIENCE

#### *The Issue*

The project faced an issue of how to design a program that could assist in the identification, partial finance and implementation of small investment projects that address a national priority as identified in the NCAPs, that have a positive and transboundary impact or address a

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<sup>1</sup> [www.gefonline.org](http://www.gefonline.org)

common problem within one of the four major areas of environmental concern as indicated in the SAP, and are socially and economically beneficial.

### *Addressing the Issue*

The MSGP was a multi- purpose initiative: first and foremost it was designed as a grant programme that aimed to address collectively identified major transboundary issues of the Caspian Sea, i.e. the fast declining commercial bioresources; eroding biodiversity & invasive species; decline in environmental quality and unsustainable coastal development. These grants were awarded to small scale investment ideas and pilot projects that make a practical impact on the ground and are replicable in the region. In other word the programme moved beyond the realm of research and investigation into tackling real life issues. Last and certainly not least, under the MSGP only those ideas brought in 'matching' funding from the proponent of the idea and/or its sponsoring partners, were entertained. In other words it also became an instrument to leverage additional funding.

Under the first GEF supported project, the MSGP was managed by the World Bank, first through an international NGO. Later on, a locally recruited staff unit, placed within the Programme Coordination Unit (UNEP), managed the MGSP, supported by a network of Public Participation Assistants (PPAs) located in coastal areas of each of the five Caspian littoral countries. Counterpart governments were invited to join in the evaluation process through scoring proposals and selecting grantees through a well defined procedure. The formal MSGP structure, that is the coordinating task force at the PCU and the PPAs, was in turn assisted in its work by the Caspian Concern Groups (CCGs).

The CCG's were decentralized informal groups in the coastal areas consisting of local authorities, costal communities, NGOs and CBOs. While the formal structure was tasked with launching the MGSP through an information campaign, collecting proposals, evaluation, selection and monitoring implementation of approved grants, the CCGs were the informal arm that assisted the programme's launch and its information campaign, volunteered views on collected ideas and helped with implementation monitoring.

The MSGP was complemented by a Micro-Environmental Grants Programme which awarded smaller grants of up to \$5000 with no matching requirement for environmental education and sensitization and awareness raising and information dissemination

The MSGP was a key component of both phases of GEF support to the CEP. The design described here was mostly adopted in the second GEF supported project which was implemented fully by UNDP. The major change in the programme was to have the PCU rather than the World Bank assume managerial decision making. The PPAs were assigned higher degrees of authority and responsibility with regard to grants management and were renamed as Matched Grants and Public Participation Assistants (MPPA). The new MGSP maintained the CCGs. In view of the programme's popularity in the region, it is proposed for inclusion in the final GEF support to the CEP.

## **RESULTS AND LEARNING**

Throughout the MSGP, grants worth almost US\$1.3 million were disbursed to 28 projects with 16 in Phase I and 12 disbursed in Phase II. In size the projects ranged from US\$10,000 to US\$100,000. Co-financing amounted to just over US\$1.6 million, half of which was in-kind. The twelve grants supported the following projects:

- ◆ Clean up of oil contaminated Soil
- ◆ Sustainable Development in Local Communities through Alternative Sources of Energy
- ◆ Artificial Spawning of Rutilus Kutom
- ◆ Sustainable Agro-ecosystem Management through Participatory Integrated Rice Crop Protection & Production
- ◆ Sperm Bank for Sturgeon Breeders in Southern Caspian
- ◆ Conservation and restoration of Caspian Sturgeon Stocks
- ◆ Cleaning the Bottom of Ural River
- ◆ Sewage Purification In Floating Hotels on Volga river
- ◆ Innovative Technology for Marketable Fish production in the Tumak Village
- ◆ Breeding Artemia Salina in Ponds
- ◆ Potable Water for Inhabitants of Goyudjik Settlement

- ◆ Collection, sorting and processing of Plastic Waste in Turkmenbashi

As an example, one of the small grants that was approved supported the creation of a sperm bank for sturgeon breeders. The decline of the Caspian Sea Sturgeon results from the various anthropogenic activities in the last decades which include deterioration of natural habitats and spawning grounds of these species in rivers, dam construction across rivers, overfishing and lack of fishing regulations, increase in the pollution load in the river and the increasing demand for caviar.

According to data available, legal catch figures for sturgeon catch in the Caspian Sea dropped from 28,500 tons in 1985 to 1345 tons in 2005. In recent years, the number of spawners caught in the Caspian Sea is small and the hatcheries suffer from their shortage for brood stock. This has seriously affected release of juveniles from hatcheries for stock enhancement purposes. The number of male caught during the breeding season is higher than that required to fertilize the eggs harvested and as a result the male genetic resources in some males are not used. This decreases the sperm yielding potential in male spawners. On the other hand sometimes female spawners are not available at the sturgeon hatchery when there are potential male spawners and this again decreases the use of genetic resources from males in fertilization activities.

The matched-small grant supported work, conducted by the Iranian Fisheries Research Organization (IFRO) and the International Sturgeon Research Institute (ISRI), aimed at creating a center for the long-term preservation of sturgeon sperms to be used in the future as a suitable gene bank resource at sturgeon hatcheries. The significant finding of this study was that the semen of all sturgeon species in the south Caspian Sea can be cryopreserved in straws using extender solution specific for sturgeons to be made available at times when there is a shortage of potential spawners.

Estimation of sperm quality and quantity was carried out on semen samples collected from a total of 34 male sturgeon spawners. Semen was collected from 18 spawners that exhibited good quality of sperms with more than 70% motility. About 1290 ml of semen from four sturgeon species was collected and cryopreserved.

Fertilization capacity was 27.4% after 4 hours and 14.3% after 24 hours indicating that the semen could be successfully stored with the given method. Semen stored for five years was also used to fertilize fresh eggs harvested from *A. persicus* (a type of sturgeon) which yielded 58.2% fertilization after 4 hours and 43.7% fertilization after 24 hours also indicating that the semen was successfully stored using the method. The technique has helped to create a storage stock of cryopreserved gametes which enable the use of cryopreserved sperms at any time even in the absence of suitable male spawners during the breeding season. The establishment of cryobanks for the long-term storage of suitable sperms from potentially suitable sturgeon spawners could play a crucial role in the genetic management and conservation of sturgeon resources. This technique provides a new management tool to fisheries management authorities to make better use of the reproduction potential.

For its part, the MEG programme financed over 50 micro projects. MSGP projects covered such areas as oil contaminated soil cleansing, small fish hatcheries, artificial spawning of endangered species, river dredging, artemia production, sustainable livelihood & alternative sources of energy for coastal communities, a fish sperm bank, small sewage treatment plants, plastic waste recycling and alternative livelihood initiatives. All of these, to various degrees addressed transboundary issues. All projects were planned to be of short-term duration, i.e. less than a year, although some of them faced delays, incurring an additional year.

The region considers the MSGP a success; an initiative that helps the needy communities and leaves a real impact on the ground. They see a programme that has brought communities drinking water; has revived certain endangered species; cleaned the soil; dredged the river and so on and so forth. It is also a programme that does not involve 'money spent on research by outsiders' In almost all CESPSAP steering committee meetings, most of the countries pressed for funding to be channeled to the MSGP. This assessment however, is not shared by all. Some critics consider it as a programme that left little impact beyond its immediate geographical locality and a programme that was accessible only for those in the know and with the money to match.

## REPLICATION

An attempt at an objective assessment of MSGP suggests that further replication should consider the following issues:

- ◆ Impact was limited and not sustainable in a few cases where the needed support was not assured by the grantee, government or sponsor. In future applications it will be a must to insure broader impact and sustainability through careful evaluation of the grantee's resources and resourcefulness.
- ◆ The Programme was perceived by some to be laden with bureaucratic requirements, especially cumbersome reporting procedures that will need to be simplified.
- ◆ The CCGs could not provide much assistance as they were not financially or formally supported by the governments and/or the CEP. Coastal communities will need to be institutionally helped to participate effectively.
- ◆ The matching requirement excluded those with less financial muscle, i.e. the most needy. Furthermore only those in the know, such as the experienced governmental authorities could obtain the right information including knowledge on how to develop, submit and pursue project ideas. In future applications a more intensive outreach campaign is essential to disseminate information on the programme.
- ◆ Grants, being considered free money, do not always provide cost-efficiency incentives. Grants could be mixed with loans and similar instruments.

## SIGNIFICANCE

This initiative can be considered as a measure to enhance and expedite the impact on the ground of the GEF projects. The programme's significance also lies in its being action-targeted; mobilizing additional resources and engaging stakeholders in project work.

## REFERENCES

- ◆ <http://www.caspianenvironment.org>
- ◆ For information on each of the small grants please visit:  
<http://www.caspianenvironment.org/newsite/Grants-MSGP.htm>

## KEYWORDS

- ◆ Small Grants Programme
- ◆ Caspian Sea

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