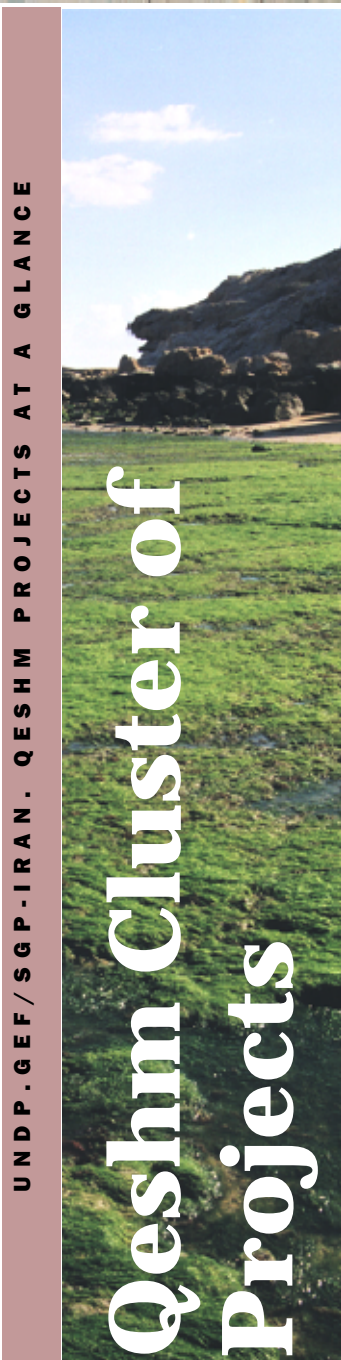


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UNDP.GEF/SGP-IRAN. QESHM PROJECTS AT A GLANCE

# Qeshm Cluster of Projects

## An Introduction

In the early 90s, Free Zone Authorities were established in southern Iran (Kish, Qeshm and Chabahar) to boost the economy through import and export of goods. The Master Plan of the Qeshm Free Zone Authority was drafted by a Swedish Company, emphasizing on Sustainable Development. It was only in year 2001 that the Environment Office of QFA officially started its work. Through engagement of a top nature conservationist as Head of the Environment Office, and following up a thorough survey of the biodiversity aspects of the island by this office (2001-2007), it became obvious that the island has unique biodiversity values, which considering the fast pace of development by QFA could be undermined.

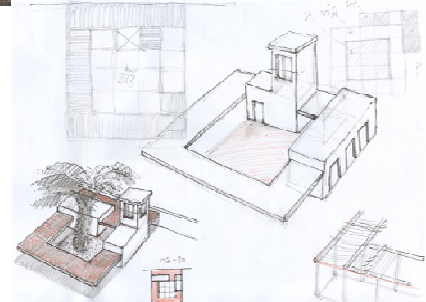
Around the same time, with ratification of the Convention for Biodiversity, Iran became eligible for grants by the Global Environment Facility. The Small Grants Programme of GEF started its work in Iran, in 2001, and as a result many of the environmental NGOs, showed interest in the programme. Although the grants were limited (maximum \$50,000), it was a good opportunity for them to work in the field of environmental conservation and learn the bottom-up approach of project formulation, implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation while working with local communities. The following presents some of SGP projects in the areas of **Climate Change**, **International Waters** and **Biodiversity**:



Located in the Strait of Hormoz, at the entrance of the Persian Gulf, Qeshm Island is the largest Island of the Persian Gulf with an area of approximately 1500km<sup>2</sup>

### Promoting traditional architectural and use of climate friendly concepts to save energy costs (Climate Change)

As part of the cultural heritage of Qeshm Island is its well-known wind towers, which have allowed households adapt to heat during centuries. With rapid development however, there has been a trend in replacing wind towers with air conditioners, and traditional architecture with modern buildings. With rising energy costs there is a possibility to help local communities reassess their priorities, while looking at some ideas from the past that are in harmony with the environment. SGP in collaboration with an NGO of professional architects and Kushe Village Council initiated a project on investigating the possibility of using concepts of Green Architecture with local communities. A pilot project was developed in 2010 in Kushe Village in collaboration with the local Village Council, designing an eco-park. The project was successfully implemented and built a good demonstration model where indigenous and modern art could help in adapting to challenges of Climate Change.



Kushe Village park inspired by traditional architecture

## **Pilot Project on Artificial Reefs for Rehabilitation of Marine Resources of Qeshm Island in Salakh area (International Waters)**

One of the first NGOs that got interested in working on Qeshm Island was Abie-Bidar which specialized on documentaries. SGP grant was to prepare a film on the state of the corals in the Persian Gulf while also looking at indigenous knowledge. As part of the project, the marine life of the northern Persian Gulf including the Qeshm Island (2001-4) was filmed. This film was then used for awareness raising among local communities. One of the sites where the film was shown was Salakh Village of Qeshm. Salakh was an important fishing port in the southern tip of Qeshm Island and the decline in fisheries had affected the local communities. It was during this showing that the local community discussed the decline in fisheries while the elders/fishermen mentioned about this tradition of purposefully disposing useless objects into the sea to enhance reef building process to boost fisheries! Building upon this idea, a project was drafted on "Artificial Reefs in Salakh area". Through close collaboration between local community of Salakh (namely the Village Council) and environmental experts (from Tehran University), with amalgamation of indigenous knowledge and scientific methods, a modulated community friendly pyramid was designed and constructed using local materials. Once introduced to the sea, it was protected and monitored by local fishermen (2002-2007). Later, experts found out that biodiversity in these reefs was rather high (EIA study by Khoramshahr Univ. in 2007). The project was recognized internationally and has the potential for up-scaling throughout the Persian Gulf region especially that the structure may be built with local materials and by local communities. However, one of the main concerns is to reserve the rights and ownership of the know-how to community of Salakh.



*Pyramid shaped locally-made structure for rehabilitation coral reefs in Salakh*

## **Aquaculture of Pearl by Local Community of Berkeh Khalaf Village (International Waters)**



**Black Lip oyster**  
(*Pinctada Margaritifera*)

Following up the community-based activities in Salakh Village, a local biologist working with the Environment Office of QFA (Sharif Ranjbar) started his MSC thesis on the endangered and very valuable Black Lip oyster (*Pinctada Margaritifera*), native to waters of Persian Gulf. A project was proposed to GEF SGP to reproduce this species with help of the local community especially fishermen of Berkeh Khalaf Village. The main objectives were to first reproduce this species in the wild (farms) and then to promote pearl production in the lab (through grafting). Considering the potential of this project to create livelihoods for local communities (and enhancing biodiversity), a small group of local women were trained to do the laboratory work (grafting operations). With the help of local fishermen (from Berkeh Khalaf) and their indigenous knowledge (as well as help from experts of Khoramshahr University), for the first time 150 pearl oysters were successfully reproduced. One of the challenges of the project is

similarly to the previous project, to reserve the rights and ownership of this know-how to the Berkeh Khalaf local community.

## **Onshore Preservation of Hawksbill turtle eggs through Community Participation (Biodiversity)**

Hawksbill turtles (*Eretmochelys imbricate*) are listed as "Critically Endangered" globally. In year 2000, the Environment Office of QFA (Bijan Darehshouri) found out that locals at Shibderaz Village consumed turtle eggs for medical purposes. QFA Environment Office with local Council of Shibderaz initiated a turtle conservation project based on monitoring and protecting the nesting grounds (2003-2005) and found out that turtles laid eggs in Shibderaz sandy beach in Spring (around March) and baby turtles hatched in April. With funding and support from GEF SGP local participation was enhanced in monitoring the site and as a result, approx. 5000 baby turtles were released back to the sea every year. Although this has been a very successful initiative, it needs to be expanded at a regional level, and so far QFA has not been able to identify the necessary partnerships.



*Hawksbill turtle laying eggs on Shibderaz shores, south of the island*

## **Conservation vs. Tourism: Ecotourism Planning for the turtle Nesting site near Shibderaz Village**

To encourage the local community of Shibderaz in turtle conservation work, ecotourism was considered as a good option to provide incentives for locals. With increasing media attention about the turtle nesting beach in Shibderaz, gradually Qeshm Island's visitors came to the site to see the turtles, especially in late March-early April as it coincides with New Year holidays in Iran. Without the necessary infrastructures in place, visitors gradually became a threat for the nesting and hatching turtles. GEF SGP Iran in collaboration with an NGO (Avaye Tabiate Paydar) started planning for ecotourism, aiming to reduce the impacts of tourism, while creating new livelihood options for the local community. The project was successful in controlling the impacts of tourism on nesting turtles in peak season, while also training a group of local youth as guides, and women in handicrafts production (also used as advocacy materials for marine turtles). One of the challenges of the project has been balancing the needs of the locals and tourists with the ecological needs of the turtles. GEF SGP further funding of a Zoning Plan was to help meet this challenge.



*Tourists interested in turtle nesting*

## **Dolphin watching and Conservation in Hengam Island (Biodiversity)**



*Dolphin watching in Hengam Island*

As a follow up to the turtle project, the local community of nearby Hengam Island, got also interested in tourism income. Interestingly Hengam had a nesting turtle population, however the tourism developed around the Dolphins population that was present around the island. As a result, boaters took tourists to show the dolphins in the wild! The result was an economic boom for Hengam Island, however, negative impacts of tourism on dolphins remained a serious concern, until an NGO (Persian Wildlife Heritage) with co-funding from SGP got involved in training the boaters preparing the Codes of Conduct. It is important also to prepare the Codes of Conduct for tourists. There is also a proposal to diversify the tourism in Hengam Island, to take the pressure off the dolphins.

## **Promoting Livelihoods for Women through Handicrafts**

During the above projects, one of the target groups have been the Qeshmi women who are known for their tedious needle work (Golabtun-douzi). To offer new livelihood options for women and also to initiate the idea of Art for Conservation (raise awareness about biodiversity through arts), GEF SGP worked with NGOs and CBOs in target villages (namely Shibderaz and Berke Khalaf) in producing local handicrafts for tourists. With increased tourism to Qeshm Island, this work has been well received and now expanded to other villages. Handicraft stores are now established in Berkeh Khalaf, at the entrance of the Qeshm Global GeoPark, give the visitors a chance to get exposed to local handicrafts and to contribute to local initiatives managed by women of Qeshm. Just recently, the QFA also has been using this opportunity to promote the island nationally and internationally.



*Presenting new designs while preserving the traditional style provides a new livelihood option for Qeshmi women*

## **Qeshm GeoPark**

In 2005, Qeshm Island was registered as a Global Geopark (UNESCO). Although this status is now pending, the area of the Geopark has been declared by QFA to cover practically the whole island, including areas where SGP has been active with local communities. As a result of strong community presence and dependence of locals on the islands resources, SGP just recently approved a project to be implemented in collaboration of the QFA GeoPark Office and local NGOs. The goal of this new project is to share the lessons learned of previous projects with new villages, near important geosites. These kinds of partnerships do allow GEF/SGP to up-scale to larger important landscapes.

## Clustering of Projects and Up-scaling

**Project Portfolios:** To date 23 projects have received grants from SGP-Iran ( total amount of \$582,000 ), 19 projects have satisfactorily been completed ( \$470,000 ) and 3 projects are ongoing ( \$162,000 ). These projects have been mainly operated in the southern shores of Qeshm Island, namely Salakh Village, Shibderaz Village and Hengam Island, as well as Berkeh Khalaf Village. Other villages that have been also involved in SGP projects are: Koshe Village, Deyrestan Village and Loft village. There has also been some co-funding to address some cross-cutting issues such as Ecotourism, Indigenous knowledge, and now the Geopark of Qeshm. Interestingly an equal number of projects have been executed by NGOs and CBOs, however more grants were made available for CBOs ( almost \$400,000 ). To date, a total amount of \$462,000 was allocated in terms of cash co-funding to the SGP projects.

**Process:** Although the initial goal of NGOs and the QFA Environment Office was conservation and protection of the islands biodiversity ( eg. coral reefs, hawksbill turtle, dolphins, etc. ), it was obvious from the beginning that this could not be achieved without providing livelihood options for local communities. This pushed the process towards training, awareness raising and income generation activities. This interesting approach which is unique to GEF/SGP produced tangible and non-tangible results such as women groups being formed, local fishermen being mobilized, local youth becoming motivated, and a chain reaction was generated in each project, and sometimes between projects, connecting different communities across the island,

**Outcomes:** SGP 's Qeshm Cluster of projects developed over 10 years, is the fruit of endless efforts by many individuals keen on Qeshm Islands ' bio and cultural landscapes. Although the initial aim of these projects was conservation of biodiversity, they have provided the seeds for economic and socio-cultural development. These demonstration projects are now ready to be shared at provincial and regional levels.

Three of the main outcomes from Qeshm Cluster of projects have been the following:

a- Considering the strong presence of local communities on Qeshm Island and their dependence on living and non-living resources, SGP support to community-based projects in collaboration with the Environment Office of QFA, have resulted in exchange of successful project outputs between villages across the island;

b- GEF SGP demonstrated that the bottom-up approach/model of decision making to planning and management works very well on Qeshm Island, which is now proposed to be expanded to the Qeshm Global GeoPark. Just recently the QFA expanded the area of the GeoPark to include GEF SGP sites in order to boost community-based planning and management in the Qeshm Global GeoPark;

C- While the initial goal of QFA was to generate income through economic and industrial development, GEF/SGP support on community-based activities especially for biodiversity conservation, have influenced this trend by providing opportunities for protection of the islands ' biodiversity and its appreciation by tourists, who have indeed become an important



## List of SGP projects on Qeshm Island

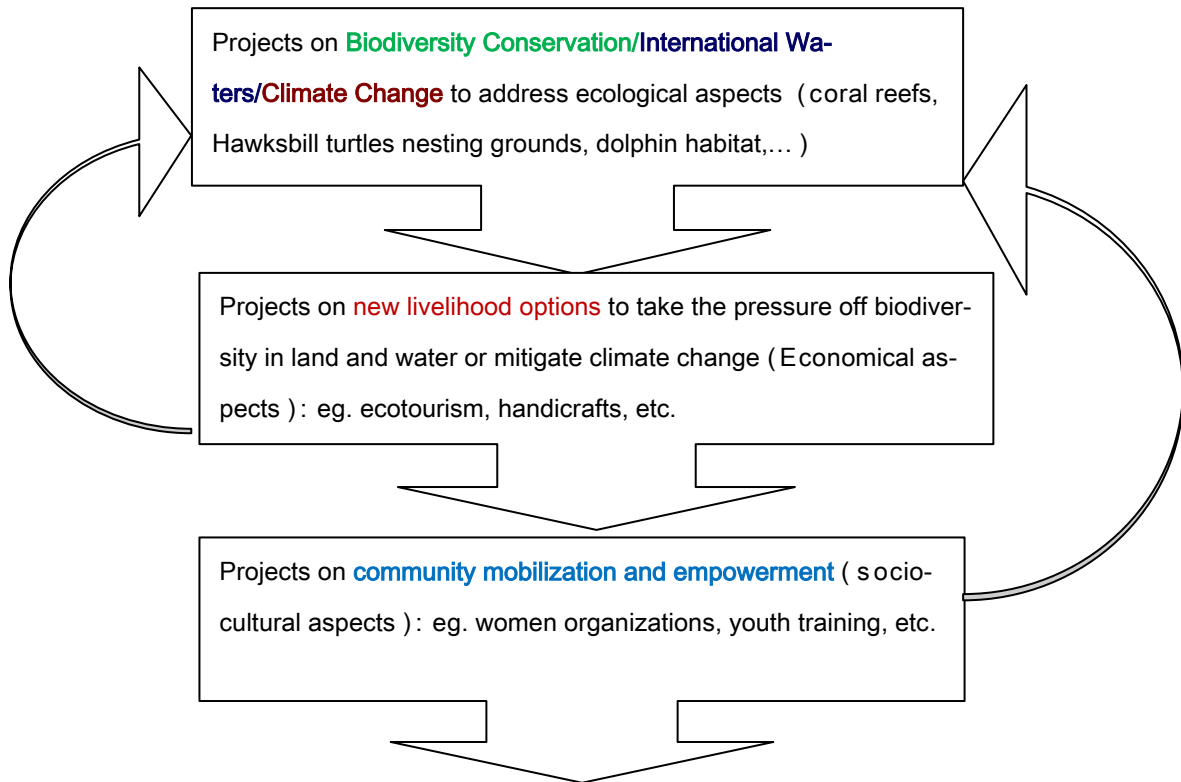
1. Study of Corals and their relationship with Indigenous people - Abie-Bidar NGO in collaboration with Qeshm Island Village communities namely in Salakh (2001-2002)
2. Pilot Project for Rehabilitation of Marine Resources of the Persian Gulf in Salakh Region - Salakh Village Council in collaboration with Tehran University experts (2002-2004)
3. Onshore Preservation of Hawksbill Turtle Eggs through Community Participation - Shibderaz Village Council in collaboration with Environment Office of QFA (2003-2007)
4. Aquaculture of Pearl by Local Community of Berkeh Khalaf Village - Berkeh Khalaf Community Group in collaboration with Persian Gulf Biotechnology Center (2003-2007)
5. Promoting and empowering local communities in production and marketing of conservation art (related to SGP project on Hawksbill turtles and nesting site) - Qeshm women group active in Handicrafts in collaboration with Environment Office of QFA (2004-2006)
6. Promoting participatory propagation of native plants & mangroves by local communities — Shibderaz and Deyrestan Village Councils (2005– 2009)
7. Networking on indigenous knowledge through literature development and local libraries on land and water resource management on Qeshm Island—Councils of Laft & Sarig-e-dulab Villages (2005– 2010)
8. Extracting baseline information for drafting a full grant project on indigenous literature on natural resources and climatic conditions of Persian Gulf, and enhancing local community libraries (Hormoz and Qeshm Islands) - Shoraye Ketabe Koodak NGO (2005-2006)
9. Replication and expansion of Artificial Reef Pyramids through enhanced communication materials (related to SGP project on Artificial Reefs) -Salakh Fisheries Cooperative with collaboration of environmental experts (2005– 2009)
10. Environmental Impact Assessment of Artificial Reef Pyramids for future replication and expansion (related to SGP project on Artificial Reefs) —Salakh Village Council in collaboration with environmental experts (2005– 2009)
11. Promoting Ecotourism on Qeshm Island (related to SGP project on Hawksbill turtles nesting site in Shibderaz) — Avaye Tabiate Paydar NGO (2005-present)
12. Empowerment of communities in marketing and alternative livelihood products in Qeshm, Dahan, and Yakhkesh— Tosseyarane Mehr NGO (2006– 2009)
13. Pearl Aquaculture on Qeshm Island —A group of local experts in collaboration with Berkeh Khalaf Village community (2006– 2011)
14. Creating Livelihoods through Ecotourism by promoting women handicrafts (related to SGP projects in Shibderaz and Berke Khalaf) - Women Handicraft's Community Organizations in Shibderaz and Berke Khalaf Villages— Avaye Tabiate Paydar (2008-2009)
15. Networking of SGP Projects in Qeshm—Technical team of environmentalists in collaboration with Local Village Councils of Lark, Laft, Shibderaz, Sarrigh, Salakh and Fishermen of Berkeh Khalaf (2008– 2011)
16. Expedite ecotourism plan for Hawksbill turtle nesting site on Qeshm Island during Now-Ruz (New Year holidays): Conservation vs. Tourism— Avaye Tabiate Paydar NGO (2008– 2009)
17. Hengam Island, Local Village Council of Hengam in collaboration with Dehyari of Hengam Island and Delphen-gam Cooperative (2009-2011)
18. Community turtle conservation fund (conservation and participatory zoning of the site) - Avaye Tabiate Paydar in collaboration with Shibderaz Village Council (2009)
19. Promoting the indigenous architectural and use of the climate friendly concepts in the coastal Persian Gulf – Moassese Farhangi Pajouheshaye Memariye Khaneh va Shahr in collaboration with Laft Village Council (2010– 2011)
20. Up-scaling of GEF SGP community projects into Geopark Villages (new)



Councils and  
Dehyaris of  
Qeshm Island



**Schematic figure to show the development of GEF SGP projects on Qeshm Island**



**Concluding remarks**

Although initially the goal of NGOs and the QFA Environment Office has been conservation and protection of the islands valuable biodiversity, such as coral reefs, hawksbill turtle, dolphins, etc. it was obvious from the beginning that this could not be achieved without providing livelihood options for local communities. For example, if the local community was told to stop consuming turtle eggs, they had to be given an incentive to do so (for example, ecotourism). This process has pushed the process towards training, awareness raising and income generation activities. This interesting approach which is unique to the Small Grants of GEF, has produced tangible and non-tangible results such as women groups being formed, local fishermen being mobilized, local youth becoming motivated.

Therefore, a chain reaction (see above figure) has been generated in each project, and sometimes between projects and at a larger scale on the island. In conclusion, it seems that ten years of presence and endless effort by all parties involved has built the ground for more community-based activities on Qeshm Island in the future, with initiatives that are taken by communities themselves, who are becoming more aware of their potentials and ready to invest in their future .

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