



# Iran

## Introduction

The Centre for Sustainable Development (CENESTA) introduced the Community Conservation Resilience Initiative (CCRI) to community representatives from Iran at a workshop in Poldokhtar, Luristan Province, in December 2014. Through consent and collaboration, they developed a variety of participatory methodologies, including the articulation of indicators to analyse resilience. This bottom-up process has ensured more involved and informed participation in the CCRI assessment.

Three communities were selected based on their unique resilience in

coping with changes in their landscape: The Abolhassani Indigenous Nomadic Tribal Confederacy for its resilience to drought, the Taklé Tribe of the Shahsevan Indigenous Nomadic Tribal Confederacy for their efforts to rehabilitate the red spotted trout, and the brown bear, and the Farrokhvand Tribe of Bakhtiari Indigenous Tribal Confederacy for their efforts to devise their own conservation plans in their lands. Each community has its own norms of customary governance, which continue to be relevant. There is a great deal of cooperation between men and women, and though women might not be physically present in decision-making bodies,

they are consulted on important issues and their opinions are part of the broader decision-making process.

Despite the long history of nomadism in this area, government and development agencies have failed to understand rangeland management that communities have practised for centuries. National policies continue to undermine nomadism, and refuse to acknowledge its importance as a specialised adaptation to local environments, its ecological role or its proven capacity to provide livelihoods.



Landscape of a typical village in Abolhassani ICCA.  
Maedeh Salimi Cenesta



Abolhassani women showing important sites and resources of the ICCA on a map. Maedeh Salimi Cenesta



# Community Conservation Resilience in Iran

The Abolhassani Indigenous Nomadic Tribal Confederacy is located in the extremely dry area of Southeast Semnan Province. It is enclosed within a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and part of a mosaic of protected areas. The Abolhassani have demonstrated remarkable resilience to drought through both indigenous knowledge and innovative solutions by incorporating limited agricultural opportunities into their mainstay of herding. The efforts of the community have also ensured

the habitat of the trout and they hope to reverse the cycle of damage. Some tribespeople also claim that the numbers of partridge have increased due to their efforts in conservation and monitoring the partridge population.

The third assessment took place with the Farrokhvand Tribe of Bakhtiari Indigenous Tribal Confederacy in Southwest Iran. The tribe has been developing a conservation plan in their mid-range ICCA, resulting in the rehabilitation

The communities identified undermining of land rights, tenure, indigenous knowledge and customary management as external threats. The nationalisation of natural resources and rangelands has taken away the rights of indigenous communities with respect to their ancestral lands and has severely undermined the resilience of communities in terms of coping with adverse environmental changes.



Taklé tribe of Shahsevan Tribal Confederacy. Maedeh Salimi Cenesta



The Taklé have been successfully reproducing two-humped camels in the ICCA. Fahimeh Seifi Cenesta

healthy pastures and forests with an abundance of endangered and/or rare plant species.

The Taklé Tribe belongs to the Shahsevan Indigenous Nomadic Tribal Confederacy in Ardebil Province. The government and private companies took over the tribe's wintering grounds a few decades ago. This increased grazing pressure on the summering grounds resulting in greater soil erosion, floods and the destruction of the habitat of the red spotted trout in Ali Dervish River. The decrease in red spotted trout has caused brown bears to leave their natural habitat. The tribe has worked to restore the

of territory based on the restoration of endangered plant species such as wild mountain celery.

Common internal threats identified by communities include a lack of interest in the youth in learning indigenous skills and knowledge and decreasing consumption of traditional foods in favour of fast food. In some areas overutilisation of available pastures has led to a decline of wildlife, degradation of pastures and invasion of woody and salty plants. This has made them more vulnerable to prolonged and increasingly intensive droughts, soil erosion and flooding.





# Preliminary Conclusions and Recommendations

Through the use of community inspired methodologies, a comprehensive set of indicators was recognised and assessed by the three tribes. The whole process established a ground for communities to review and assess how their initiatives are working, from different perspectives (such as improving the communities' resilience in coping with environmental shocks). Based on the assessments, certain recommendations were made, most of which implied the need for a real change in official policies.

For example, the tribes suggest much more flexibility and trust from the government regarding grazing licenses, which should be based on customary management. Additionally, the government should play a more enabling role by purchasing livestock and dairy products at a fair price and offering relief to livestock and communities during periods of drought. Other solutions include exploring the potential of local crafts, specifically crafts made by women and technical inputs to complement traditional management of livestock, orchards, fodder and water harvesting systems. While there is always room for technical and financial support from the government, the national policies on nomadic people and their governance needs a serious revision. Governments should consult and build on the resilience of

nomadic peoples' indigenous knowledge and their initiatives should be taken seriously in development policies. Indigenous nomadic communities show great affinity to restitution of their customary range management practices.

The communities' suggestion to a broader audience is to acknowledge the ecological role of grazing in maintaining rangelands and that this traditional system of rangeland management be considered as an



Migrating between summer and winter pastures.  
Cenesta

alternative to conventional management systems. At the national level, legal reform is needed to provide some recognition for elders' judgements on various matters, especially those pertaining to management of natural resources.

Through the CCRI project, a range of positive efforts was identified for the continued promotion of conservation resilience initiatives. The efforts of community elders with respect to conflict resolution led to commitments and trust building

among tribal communities. Furthermore, the active involvement of community members in implementing conservation resilience initiatives results in an increasing sense of ownership, social identity and motivation for conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in tribal territories.

Predicting all the challenges and solutions is not possible in the first stages of this process, but information sharing among different tribal peoples and their involvement in the process gives much more flexibility for responding to future challenges and barriers within the communities.

Internal and external support for communities and the financial capacity of tribal institutions are also important factors in terms of mobilising the social capital needed to implement communities' resilience

initiatives. Even small support and resources for recognition of indigenous peoples' and community conserved territories and areas (ICCAs) at various levels would be a step forward for formal recognition and strengthening of ICCAs and the governance of indigenous peoples with respect to the conservation, sustainable use and restoration of natural resources at the country level. These systemic changes can greatly enhance communities' resilience.



## Testimony

Ahmad Salehi explains the “Coping with the Drought Cycle” initiative. Photo extracted from video by Ramin Rouhani

“The climate used to be quite different in the past (in Abolhassani ICCA). Summers were warmer and winters quite colder. I even remember when I was a school kid, some years it snowed up to forty times. It used to rain all the time. However, the environmental conditions have changed. In the last 15 years, we have rarely had thriving springs... We soon realised that the traditional form of livestock rearing doesn't work any more. Those who kept too many sheep, lost them due to droughts. So, we decided to reduce the number of sheep and invest the money partly in agriculture. We started growing barley to be used by lambs in the reproductive season. This way, we could increase each lamb and sheep weight up to 30 kilos by May and generate quite an extra income. We realised that this initiative works much better than just increasing the numbers of sheep and goats when a simple drought could destroy most of them.”



Migrating between summer and winter pastures.  
Maedeh Salimi (Cenesta)



Red spotted trout caught by Taklé tribespeople to be transferred to Ali Darvish River.  
Fahimeh Seifi (Cenesta)

