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Mediterranean Action Plan
Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas

**Regional Project for the Development
of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas
in the Mediterranean Region
(MedMPA)**

**Ras Al-Bassit / Oum Al-Toyour Protected
Area - Socio economic Analysis**

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Introduction

While carrying out this study (May to June 2004), the process of Rapid Rural Appraisal was adopted. The aim was to use the opportunity not only to collect necessary data in many times within an informal atmosphere but rather to create a *dialogue* with different stakeholders at a country of no past history in marine protected areas MPA.

The target groups varied from local governmental agencies – at the level of municipalities up to the governorship –, local fishermen, tourist players and the general public. This participatory approach allowed for more interactive and flexible relationship whether through discussions with civil local chiefs to just contemplating over the context of a local Friday prayer sermon.

It is crystal-clear right from the start, that turning any part of Syria's 183 km coastal line with all the current pressures into an MPA would request it to be a *multiple-objective* one that takes into consideration the different human activities of the coastal rural communities as well as the State.

The Current Status

The Institutional & Legal Framework

Oum Al-Toyour was declared as a "forestry environmental" PA by the Ministry of Agriculture & Agrarian Reform "MAAR" with the space of 10000 "Donum" (a measure of land 1000 sq m) on 13 May 1999. The stated purpose was to "preserve the migrating birds that resort to the site and the prevailing forestry trees". The western boundary is the Mediterranean Sea.

Ras Al-Bassit was declared a "forestry environmental" PA by the Ministry of Agriculture & Agrarian Reform "MAAR" with the space of 3000 hectares on 29 May 1999. The stated purpose was "to preserve the forestry plants, animals, birds especially migrating ones and biodiversity to the benefit of scholars and the scientific research.." The western boundary is the Mediterranean Sea.

The only other coastal PA declared in Syria is that of Ibn Hani by virtue of the Ministerial Decree No. 23/T dated 19 July 2000 with the space of 1000 hectare.

In 09 June 2003, the minister of the State Ministry for Environmental Affairs (before getting merged and called the Ministry of Local Administration & Environment) formed a National Committee to put the categories, definitions, objectives and criteria for PA's in Syria.

One of the eight categories that the Committee approved was called "The Coastal-Marine PA". Its objectives included socio-economic benefits yet with "line fishing" allowed but not "commercial fishing" for example.

Still, there are no protected areas identified as coastal-marine yet in Syria. Thus, the Ministerial Decree to join the two current PA's of Oum Al-Toyour and Ras Al-Bassit as ONE Coastal-Marine PA is a prerequisite to match the administrative & legal context.

Administration

The suggested PA relates to the Qastal Ma'af county with two main municipalities falling within its administrative borders:

1. Al-Bassit municipality: to it belongs the villages of Al-Badrousseh, Al-Ghassanieh, Al-Chiekh Hassan, Al-Bassit, Al-Difleh, Al-Falah, Al-Swawaneh in addition to small neighboring farms (Al-Manara, Al-Safra, Al-Sukkareh and Al-Sahim). The total local population in the municipality is approximately 15000, 2000 of which live in the village of Al-Bassit.
2. Al-Isawiyeh municipality: to it belongs the villages of Al-Isawiyeh, Oum Al-Toyour, Al-Balouta, Biet Al-Qsier, Al-Hibshkieh, Al-Qar'anieh and Al-Sinbleh. The approximate population of the villages of Al—Isawiyeh is 2000 and Oum Al-Toyour 2000.

The number of local residents raise at the summer time due to the return of local citizens living outside the region home to spend it with their families and relatives.

Social Services

The area of the suggested MPA includes a dispensary at Al-Bassit offering children vaccines, mothers medical care and other medical services to locals. In general there are no public health problems.

NGO's & Public Organizations

While none of the new raising environmental NGO's in Syria yet expended its activities to the region, traditional "public organizations" have long been in the region. The Farmers Union represented by Farmers Cooperatives gave Loans, fodder, and fertilizers along with agricultural guidance for farmers. In spite of some illiteracy courses, no elderly nor handicaps services are available neither any of the sport, cultural or charity clubs are practically present in the region. In particular, there is a clear absence of the role of the Woman Union – one of the powerful traditional "public organizations" in Syria – unlike most rural areas in the country.

The Two Municipalities

The municipalities did look for a bigger support from the government e.g. more budgets, workers etc. Their role included collecting garbage and spraying insecticides in the summer.

Infrastructure

The area is well served by electricity lines, communication system, drinking water, and fair roads with branches of tourist transport companies with routes to Damascus and Aleppo. The 2 GSM networks are covering almost all the corners of the region along with regular telephone lines. Overall, there is a great degree of accessibility of all to the region that led to a conflict of interest among different activities. The MPA must work to enhance the compatibility between different interests and activities.

The Waste

The disposal of waste is a main issue. A-Bassit municipality moves it by its tractor to a dump of 2000 sq m. space at Al-Fidieh/Al- Isawiyeh road While at Oum Al-Toyour it's deposited at neighboring valleys.

The Al-Bassit municipality is planning to have a disposal unit.

Unlike the sewage system available at most neighboring villages at Al-Badrousseh, Al-Chiekh Hassan and Al-Chiek Hassan, this is not the case in Al-Bassit where some chalet & other public places owners are discharging tourist summer season sewerage by even night pumping it directly to the sea!

Income Sources

Locals income depends on three main sources; fishing, agriculture & tourism. Fishing in Al-Bassit municipality is the main source of income of around 40 families (500 people) most of them come from Al-difleh where 85% of the population are fishermen. The monthly average income per fisherman is 5000 SYP. The yearly fee paid to the Syndicate of Fishermen is 250 SYP. Fish prices are 100 to 1000 SYP per kilogram. They are aware of the continuous depletion of stocks caused by many factors e.g. overexploitation of resources.

In Oum Al-Toyour 30 to 40 families are depending on fishing with a monthly average of 1500 SYP.

No marina is available at neither Oum Al-Toyour nor Al-Bassit. In winter, storms often cause the loss of 2 to 4 boats due to this factor.

In summer boat trips are a common visitor activity. The income per season is approximately 100000 SYP per boat. The number of recreational boats are 25 in Al-Bassit – some of it is same used for fishing.

The prevailing agriculture in the region is that of citrus and olive trees. In Al-Difleh 15% of the population are working in the agriculture with a space of 10 to 15 Donum. The majority of people at Omm Al-Toyour work in agriculture along with many of Al-Isawieh with a total of 3800 up to 5000 Sq m of owned agricultural land. Farmers are reported to hunt the Wild boars to secure agricultural land from its effects. Some unconfirmed incidents of gazelle hunt were also incurred.

Chalet renting is a major source of income to the region. The chalets in Oum Al-Toyour are 75% owned by its citizens, few are owned by citizens of Al- Isawiyeh and very few are owned by Damascenes.

The rental rates are from 200 up to 3000 SYP per night depending on the season.

Unemployment

Unemployment rate looks to be high in the region in spite of the fact that there are no registered numbers of it. Other than fishing and agriculture, there are limited job opportunities at small building materials factories of marble and floor tiles and the marble quarry at Al-Badrousieh.

Safety

The region enjoy a great deal of safety inland e.g. organized crime 0% and at the sea e.g. no strong currents and storms. It's expected that all will carry their activities without any hindering aspects.

Conservation

The coastal line is totally preserved from any illegal activity. The Directorate of Ports have four watch points in Al-Bassit and two in Omm Al-Toyour to organize granting fishing licenses, control fishing and penalizing violators. Some fishermen reported that some of its members and/or staff are either involved or at least not fully carrying out their duties. Moreover, some fishermen also reported explosives fishing at different areas along with bottom trawl boats (2 out of 5 are privately owned while the State have totally stopped their and any other boats). Terrestrial violations include woodcutting to get heat especially in winter and to expand agricultural land on the expense of the forest noting that the law is very strict in such cases.

The Expropriation

In the early seventies, the state wanted to shift the Syrian coastal line into a big destination of the recreation of the workers & the formers in the socialist model. Some officials at the time even suggested to blast the some parts of the coastal line in order to substitute it with sands beaches more suitable for recreational activities!

On that basis, the Ministry of Tourism expropriated the whole coastal strip with an inland distance of 3 km in return of humble financial return. Many of the people never agreed to receive that money and still claim their land. The decision stated that no developments should take place that eventually included natural urban expansion! Eventually, the State never executed its plans but the status of all that land was static since then. Recently, and under great pressures the Assembly of the People (Syrian Parliament) formed a Committee to study this issue & a long legal process looks to have started to reverse that situation.

This bizarre situation led to different conflicting effects. Under the powerful central authorities, it lead to a fair conservation of the Syrian Mediterranean forests – along with declaring the area as a reserve by MAAR – yet local communities found ways and means for their unorganized urban expansions e.g. ugly architecture of new chalets

expansion in Omm Al-Toyour along with more importantly great hatred of this decision due to its effects on their daily lives.

Some locals at Omm Al-Toyour expressed their fears that the MPA will be the "replacement" for the expropriation!

Efforts are under way between the Ministry of Tourism and MLAE to allocate expropriated areas that should be converted into PA's, thus local concerns can be fully understood especially in the lack of knowledge of community engagement in MPA's.

The Tourism Industry

Tourism is a very important activity in summer. The number of visitors in Ras Al-Bassit in summer per year goes up to 150000.

The Local Market is the main market. Al-Bassit is the example set by the Sate for the recreational destinations of the workers. The Workers Union was the first to step in the area and it is by virtue of its activities that Al-Bassit stands as it is today.

The Union established the chalet system then later in 1991 opened its 36 rooms 3 star property. In 2001, the hotel became a year-round destination with 42 workers. Syrians are the great majority of its residents with 40% from Damascus and 60% from Aleppo.

The second top are the Arabs; 80% of them are Jordanians and the rest are other Arabs mainly from GCC countries.

Foreigners are very few and are mainly residents in Syria e.g. embassies and international organizations.

The main activity is staying at the beach or going in excursion to Omm Al-Toyour, Kasab or to the city of Lattakia.

The hotel management is reserved a 250m of shore opposite the hotel reserved and fenced for its clients.

The high season extends from mid May till mid September, whereas the shoulder season extends from mid March to mid May and from mid September to mid November while the rest is low season. Unfortunately, the hotel does not keep a record for the number of tourists and nights but have just started doing that recently at the request of the Ministry of Tourism. The Union authorities have completed a study to enlarge the hotel to become of a72 rooms & are waiting to finalize new budget plans to carry out the expansion.

Other than the hotel, the Union runs 350 chalets at Al-Bassit. Workers at the Union do rent these chalets according to a rotation-scheme with minimal charges.

The Farmers Union have recently completed its own hotel & resort north of A-Bassit to be opened in summer 2005, while the number of available

chalets for rent in Omm Al-Toyour is 200. The private sector has its own chalets with an active real-estate trade due to the rising rates.

Enhancing the sustainability of tourism (sustainable levels of use, quality of the product and visitor experience etc.) is still an undertaken task by no authority. The workers Union and even the newly formed Chamber of Tourism of the Coastal region are viable partners of the PA to work with in the future stage.

The Archeological Site

((A Historical Background - Ras Al-Bassit

Greek name: Posideion / Latin name: Posidium

Period: Late Bronze Age (c1550-1200 BC)

The French excavations 1971 to 1984 revealed a small settlement with citadel founded as an outpost of Ugarit during the Late Bronze Age, surviving into the Iron Age. It had strong links with Phoenicia and Cyprus and received a Greek colony in the seventh century BC but was destroyed during the Persian period (539-331 BC).

Alexander passed this way in 333 BC (the Battle of Issus took place not far to the north near modern-day Alexandretta) and it became a Seleucid settlement after 313 BC under the name of Posideion with a fortress on its small acropolis. A new phase of development began with the re-fortification of the town in the third century AD.

A basilica was erected at the foot of the acropolis, the port facilities improved and houses for the wealthy constructed. The port was still in use during the Crusades and was a destination for Venetian ships in the 15 to 16th centuries. By the 19th century, it was used only by the local fishing community.

To the north is Mount Cassius (Jebel al-Aqra). At 1728 m, it is the highest peak on the coast. It was known in Hittite records as Mount Hazi or Nanni. The summit was sacred to the Phoenicians (Ugarit) and the Greeks (Zeus).

The Emperors Hadrian and Julian (the Apostate) climbed to worship on the peak. The Crusaders knew it as Mont Parlerius or Parlier.))

Today, the site is left out in a pathetic status. The old port is mixing with the current fishermen "marina", behind the site a military point have rested; a point that should be handled to ensure future freedom of site visitors along with clearing PA land, and the ruins are left totally unattended with additional missing parts by time. The place can be a hub for visitors if the right planning is in place including opening the main building of the archeological mission along with other steps.

Other shrines of visits include holy places for the local renamed after important messengers & gifted clergy e.g. St. Georges (Al-Khuder) north of Al-Bassit village.

Fishing

In Al-Bassit, the registered fishing boats are 100 (7 to 11 meters) in number, while the registered fishermen are 300 in number in addition to 30-40 line fishermen. Another 50 are to be found in Omm Al-Toyour and Wadi Al-Qandeel. Fishermen have decreased in number among locals so that some fishermen are coming from Lattakia to work in the area.

All types of fishing are used; net, bait, traps, trawl boats and even dynamite where it was noticed to be prevailing again instead of the control points along the shoreline.

In Omm Al-Toyour, The boats are only 10 in number due to having no marina, whereas "stranger" fishermen - around 30 to 50 boats - coming from other areas in the coast e.g. Jableh and Lattakia do fish in the area at certain seasons e.g. sardines. Most fishing are taking place between Ras Al-Malaha and Al-Hammam Isles whereas the sea currents obstruct fishing southwards. Then, fish is mostly transported to Lattakia with only some sold in the area sometimes directly to tourists.

Local's expectations of the MPA include the idea that arbitrary prohibit of fishing will take place. The concepts of the "No-Take" zones and the replenishment areas need to be more clarified before being able to build rapport with the fishing community on the way to win their full confidence.

Water

Due to the expropriation, it is not allowed to dig artesian wells. Al-Bassit drinks from the water of Al-Badrusieh while Omm Al-Toyour drinks from the nearby Balouran Dam. There are four seasonal rivers; Chiekh Hassan and Al-Difleh in Al-Bassit, Al-Aswad and Isawieh near Omm Al-Toyour. Some areas by these rivers are suitable for future ecotourism activities.

Education

All the villages and farms of Al-Bassit have elementary schools. There are two secondary schools one in Al-Bassit and the second in Al-Falah.

High school students get their education at Zeghreen 20 kms away. University graduates are few in number as most teachers come from outside the region e.g. Lattakia, yet many influential people with respected social status are originally from the region. No doubt that tourism & agriculture have played a role in having higher income for the population.

The contrary takes place in Omm Al-Toyour with only two schools one elementary and one secondary established only two years ago. The high illiteracy level with the lack of university graduates, is due to the Turcoman ethnic origin of the population there and the prevalence of their own language and children leaving schools to join certain crafts e.g. fishing, blacksmith or others at the Industrial City of Lattakia. The situation is just the opposite at the near by Al-Isawieh where literacy is about 95% of the population some as doctors, engineers and teachers. In particular, women are mostly illiterate with almost no activities at all.

The cultural Heritage

In general terms, the population of the area are conservative Moslems. Though, Omm Al-Toyour (along with the northern nearby Al-Badrusieh citizens are decedents of a Turcoman ethnic minority, yet most residents in the area are Arabs while everybody's of the Sunni & Ja'afarai Moslem sects. Due to being a minority, intermarriages are very common in Omm Al-Toyour and Al-Badrusieh which results in socio-economic closures and even medical troubles. Among the interesting prevailing habits in Omm Al-Toyour is that upon inheritance men always inherit the agricultural lands whereas women inherits the shoreline by the sea!

Analysis - recommendation for the management

Local Communities

The key element in the success of the PA is stakeholder involvement. Locals in the area still consider MPA's to be the traditional sanctuaries of the past. They are under severe long pressures of the expropriation where no urban or agricultural expansion is allowed, no wells to dig and no loans. The second major issue for them is the marina in Al-Bassit & Omm Al-Toyour. In Al-Bassit, the governmental budget for the project is

there but with no actual steps whereas in Omm Al-Toyour is neither the project nor the amount are yet envisioned. The third priority is the sewage system in both Al-Bassit and Omm Al-Toyour which is a real threat to the already degrading quality of sea water.

A process of wider community consultation should start at once and especially in Omm Al-Toyour where we have obviously a perplexed situation of an ethnic minority. Some locals there were wondering why Omm Al-Toyour for a PA? The implied understanding is that of an underestimation of its ability to defend it self in front of another *imposed* decision.

There should be practical means and ways to compensate communities negatively affected by the MPA. The legal framework should equally guarantee the rights of the locals along with a broader definition of benefits as part of the economic valuation of the marine and coastal ecosystems conservation. Supportive economic measures and incentives like special fishing rights or even allowing fishing syndicates to co-manage the marine resources as a responsible partner can be a major inducement.

Ecotourism

There is a considerable potential in developing a package of new tourism products for different markets at the MPA. In particular, there is one place on the beach that offers ecotourism marine activities which is a valuable chance for the MPA to start attracting extra attention by offering varied innovatively-designed products new to the Syrian destination as a whole. For example, no any diving activity are taking place in the country at the moment. Ecotourism will also offer job opportunities along with extra income for locals and to back up the sustainability of the MPA in light of the expected lack of governmental and donor resources.

There should be legal ways to financially empower local communities from any expected future ecotourism incomes through decentralization of authorities avoiding central treasury.

Even more, the management of the MPA should not have unrealistic expectations of income as this is a new production line is need still of many important professional touch before becoming a 'cash cow' of earnings.

Mapping & Boundary Demarcation

Terrestrial & Marine Zoning is yet to be looked at carefully due to the present lack of excellent maps, and to be handled by a professional team using satellite photos along with detailed maps. The Village of Al-Bassit looks to be the “man-made” northern border of the MPA while expanding the southern borders to lands beyond Omm Al-Toyour village looks a viable option.

In all cases, all neighboring areas are subjected to the same elements of limited possibilities of urban and agricultural expansions as they actually fall under the same category at the end of the day. Ras Al-Bassit / Omm Al-Toyour PA should always be looked at as part of a forthcoming Coastal Zone Management where adjacent Zones of Influence are the trans boundaries of Lebanon and Turkey.

Generating awareness

Most users of the area especially local communities have very limited and often wrong information concerning the marine environment. To correct the situation, action should be taken on three levels:

A visitor center on-site will be the focal point for any promotional activities. Displays, exhibits & different interpretative methods should be used to ensure passing the right message.

A special relation with the A-Ba'ath Children Camp at site must be established to promote the marine environmental protection to the children of the country at an early stage of their lives. Similar activities should be also established with all schools, Tishreen University & all other educational bodies in the coastal region.

A public awareness campaign on the national scale will then be pursued. All effective national media tools are to be used e.g. public service T.V. announcements to highlight the threats to the beauty of Syrian marine life in general and to focus on the special characteristics of Ras Al-Bassit / Omm Al-Toyour coastal marine protected area with its crustaceans, molluscs, sea turtles, dolphins and possible presence of monk seal all as signs of its welfare.

Educating the authorities

While carrying out the study, it was clear that though "everyone" is in support of the environment as a concept at the levels of educators & authorities, there was some considerable ignorance of real environmental issues & values. Authorities such as governmental employees, military marine forces, police, judges and others have first to be convinced of the MPA and the environmental measures. Presentations, discussions and round-tables should be launched to foster a sense of responsibility towards the marine life while reviewing its current status in the country including valid rules, regulations & laws with corrective and/or punitive suggestions.

Enforcement and Monitoring

Enforcement activities are of vital importance in the preservation of ecosystems. Not putting laws into effect is a major problem in Syria. The ineffectiveness of laws led the judiciary to come with more strict and sometimes extreme laws but yet with many violations e.g. fishing by explosives and hunting. It is not only that the authorities should be serious and firm about the enforcement but also should be ready to delegate part of the tasks through a transparent collaborative monitoring system to measure the impact and reliability of the management deeds.

Meetings & References

Meetings with the Management of the Workers Union

Meetings with local chiefs (Mukhtars) of Al-Bassit, Al-Isawieh and Omm Al-Toyour

Meetings with fishermen at Al-Bassit & Omm Al-Toyour

Meetings with locals at Ras Al-Bassit & Omm Al-Toyour

Monuments of Syria, Ross Burns (Ras Al-Bassit historical background)

Ministerial Decrees – Declaration of Protected Areas

Protected Areas; types, objectives and criteria MLAE

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