



The Medicinal Plants Conservation Project

Poverty Alleviation & Gender Equality in the Bedouin Community of Saint Katherine

A Worldwide Responsibility— MPCP's Contribution to the UN Millennium Development Goals

Following a world summit at the UN Headquarters in New York in 2000, world leaders adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration, which meant committing their nations to a new global partnership in reducing extreme poverty through what is called the Millennium Development goals, with a deadline set to 2015. To achieve the UN Millennium Goals, the Millennium Project was thereafter commissioned in order to develop a concrete action plan for the world's governments to follow. The goals set out to eradicate extreme poverty by reducing income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter and exclusion, while promoting environmental sustainability, gender

equality, human rights to enable people access to education, health, security and shelter. The Medicinal Plants Conservation Project (MPCP) is directly contributing the UN Millennium Goals when it comes to poverty reduction and gender equality connected to the environment. Livelihood strategies and food security of the poor often depend directly on functioning ecosystems for goods and services. The poor often have insecure rights to natural resources and inadequate access to environmental information, markets and decision-making – limiting their capability to protect the environment and to improve their livelihoods and well-being. Lack of access to ene-

rgy services limits productive opportunities for the poorest, especially in rural areas. Concerning gender equality, women are especially burdened by water and fuel collection, which reduces their time and opportunity for education, literacy and income-generating activities. Women often have unequal rights and insecure access to land and other natural resources, limiting their opportunities and ability to access other productive assets. Moreover, due to the social norms and traditions of the Bedouin community many women face difficulties in becoming active empowered participants in the community. Lastly, all NGOs become automatically part of a global partnership by working towards these common goals of ending extreme hunger and poverty.

The MPCP is Contributing in the following UN Millennium Goals:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Global partnership for development
- Environmental sustainability

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Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

Saint Katherine Protectorate (SKP) is one of world's most amazing areas, not only for its natural landscape, but also for its medicinal plants diversity that is attracting national and global interest. Among the present 472 species, 19 are of global significance and more than one hundred species are used for medicinal purposes. The Bedouin communities who live in SKP have developed an extensive knowledge over the past millennia of the various ways in which medicinal plant species can be used. This in turn has formed a part of their integral economic value while living in a delicately balanced environment. The Medicinal Plants Conservation Project (MPCP) is a national Egyptian project that aims at examining and eliminating the

root causes to the loss in biodiversity and addressing the threats to the conservation and sustainable use of medicinal plants in Egypt through a number of interventions, while at the same time empowering the Bedouin community to use and manage its resources in a sustainable manner. The MPCP is developing the capacity of the Bedouin community to cultivate and sustainably harvest wild Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAP) in abandoned orchards and gardens inside the nature protectorate, in addition to conduct the necessary processing as well as to inform people of the benefits from their production in commensurate with the tourist nature of the region. Therefore, the MPCP adopted a participatory approach and adaptive management to the process that

lead to the successful establishment of a Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) system by which the SK Bedouins will share control over the MAPs, as well as attain tangible benefits from such management that will drive the sustainable use and management of these globally significant resources. In addition, the project has established and is operating several programs that all work to achieve the project outcomes; in-situ and ex-situ conservation, public awareness, and biodiversity education.



A meeting with the Bedouin community in Saint Katherine for the CBNRM establishment.

Creating Opportunities for Bedouin Women

Unlike the position of women in Ancient Egypt, Egypt's women do not enjoy quite the same gender equality today. In general, the women of Egypt are among the most vulnerable groups affected by downsizing of the government civil sector and are less favoured by the private sector due to maternal leaves stipulated by law. On the political front, women in Egypt received the right to vote and stand for elections in 1956. They have full constitutional rights, but there is both lack of awareness of such rights as well as lack of interest due to female dual roles.

Thus, there is a need for strong efforts to achieve greater gender empowerment socially (through health and education improvement), economically (through vocational training and micro-credit) and politically (through advocacy, raising awareness and facilitating the issuance of identity cards for women).

Awareness of these issues have been found to be more effective, and hopefully long-lasting, if they reach people's minds, both men and women, at an earlier age. Therefore, the MPCP is working closely with 180 women and children through the Green School Program. The

focal point of the program is to raise awareness of medicinal plants and their environment to children through various activities, from drawing and in-class learning, to practical school visits to cultivation sites, such as greenhouses, and creating medicinal plants gardens in their school area. Both Bedouin boys and girls are part of the program and it is hoped that future generations will enjoy an increase of equal rights in the Bedouin community.

Bedouin children taking part in a school visit to one of MPCP's greenhouses to learn more about the cultivation of medicinal plants.



Bedouin girls planting seedlings for a medicinal plants garden in a school in Saint Katherine.



Gender Equality and Empowerment of the Saint Katherine Bedouin Community

There are many restrictions on enrollment for Bedouin women in outdoor workplaces as well as access to resources and markets; an attitude due to conservative trends in the Bedouin community. However, the role of women in Bedouin economic activities is important. They participate in household chores when the men are away, while grazing and herding is exclusively the role of unmarried or older women as well as the collection of fuel wood is a woman's task. One of the major challenges faced by the Bedouin community of SKP is gender inequality. Women still lack independent rights to own land, manage property, conduct business, or even travel without their husbands' consent. Women continue to have systematically poorer command over a range of productive resources, including land, information, and financial resources. To contribute to the enhancement of the women's position in the Bedouin community and reducing poverty, the MPCP has supported the establishment of the Medicinal Plants

Association (MPA). This local NGO is playing a critical role in poverty alleviation and Bedouin women empowerment since the MPA is supporting women's equity in voice, access to resources, and rights.

The MPA is encouraging women to be involved in decision making processes by raising their membership numbers and convincing the community to elect women to be board members (25% of the MPA board are women). To support women's access to resources, the MPA is providing raw materials and financial support for Bedouin women to enable them to produce their traditional handmade products through the Handicraft Program, implemented through the MPA and the Bedouin women and supported by MPCP. The program concentrates on women as the major asset in order to support their situation in the community. Women are involved in the packaging of dried MAPs as well as the creation of the packaging material for the plants. Gifts like handmade bags, wall ornaments

and necklaces and bracelets are also made by women through the program. 54 women have also received loans from the existing Revolving Fund at the MPA to buy cookers and butane cylinders which has reduced firewood collection significantly and improved the quality of life of these women. Loans for small honey production businesses as an alternative income source to further reduce pressure on target resources have also been issued. 294 women are members of the MPA with three full-time employees and 55 part-time employees. The MPA plays an important role in promoting gender equality in Saint Katherine and it is believed that awareness raising and communication between the Bedouin community and the MPCP and MPA have contributed a great deal to female Bedouin participants. Moreover, 95% of the wild collectors in SK are women; therefore, strengthening the value chain, controlling the trade according to fair trade concepts, and adding value to



Supporting women in equality in voice, access to resources, and rights.

the medicinal plants products, will lead to their empowerment. Additionally, the MPCP's activities aim at including women in the production of newly developed products, thus training them for income-generating activities, such as the Green Gold Association for Bedouin MAP collectors, that are more lucrative and profitable than their current line of products.

Working Towards Poverty Alleviation

One of the UN Millennium Development Goals is to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people. The MPCP has worked extensively to engage the Bedouin community in production and sales of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAP) with most of the benefits and revenues returning directly back to them. The livelihood of a majority of the Saint Katherine Bedouins depends on tourism and related activities. The poorer members of the Bedouin society with no or limited access to tourism depend on MAP trade. The project aims at conserving these plants by securing alternative resources through administrating an Access and Benefit Sharing

(ABS) law that will regulate access to the Biodiversity Resources (BR) and Bedouin Traditional Knowledge (TK) with the community sharing of benefits/revenues arising from the utilization; develop necessary guarantees to give these revenues to the community; and register BR and Bedouin TK in the national registry, which will preserve their rights. It is thus envisioned that the project will contribute to the eradication of extreme poverty among the most vulnerable groups with the least access to the MAPs in the Bedouin society. To further raise market sales so that the revenues become boosted to the Bedouin community, a short term action plan was put into action in which

the main goal is to attract the tourism section; this was mainly done through the establishment of six farms that produce MAPs and serve as demonstration farms for tourists, six propagation and cultivation green houses, processing tunnels, MAP living gene bank and a seed bank, and the opening of a Bedouin outlet store in the premises of the MPA in SKP where handmade products (made by mainly Bedouin women through the Handicraft Program) are sold as well as dried MAPs. Tourists who visit the area can also take part of a Biodiversity Tour where visits to each of the above locations are offered. Also, to increase sales, a Bedouin product catalogue including organic food and MAPs as well as handicrafts has been published.



Dried packaged medicinal plants ready to be sold.

It is envisioned that the project will contribute to the eradication of extreme poverty among the most vulnerable groups with the least access to the MAPs among the Bedouin society

Economic Development and Sustainable Livelihood Support



With the support from MPCP, the Medicinal Plants Association (MPA) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) established in Saint Katherine that depends on the volunteers' efforts to play an effective role in their community. The aim of the MPA is to create a better future for the subsequent generations through community development and ensuring better standards of life. In partnership with the MPCP, they have established and operate a successful economic development program called the Handicrafts Program. The program includes various sub-programs, such as 1) the Honey Production Program, 2) the Medicinal Plants Production Program, 3) the Microloan Program, and 4) the Marketing Program. In addition, a MAP collector association—the Green Gold Association—was created representing 48 Bedouin female collect-

Photos: cultivation farm, drying tunnel, honey production and tourists buying MAP products.

ors. These programs are creating more than 200 direct jobs, generating adequate income (for more than 1000 persons) and supporting livelihoods (more than 350 are direct beneficiaries of the programs) by utilizing the use of local vocation; promoting local culture preservation; and providing access to niche markets, through the capacity building of organizations and craftswomen for the competitive market. Moreover, these programs consider the differences among the various tribes of SK and values this diversity as well as emphasizing the local contexts. The implementation of the programs' actions are done through the MPA, the MPCP and the local Bedouin community. The programs offer: capacity building through workshops, seminars and courses; structures for the supply chain through diagnosis and implementation of management and production methodologies; and the establishment of production schemes of events and markets for commercialization of products.

To promote integrated development, the programs also promote the establishing of commercial mechanisms, the articulation of the different stakeholders involved in the activity, and the creation and strengthening of small businesses. They concentrate on women as the major asset to support their situation in the community. Therefore, the Handicrafts Program plays an important role in promoting economic development, poverty reduction, gender equality and sustainable livelihood for the local community in Saint Katherine.

The MPA plays an important role in promoting economic development, poverty reduction, gender equality and developing sustainable livelihood for the local community in Saint Katherine

NGOs Working towards Poverty Alleviation and Women Empowerment in Saint Katherine

Bedouin Women Empowerment

POLITICAL RIGHTS:

Equality in Voice

The trained women (55 women) have become members in the MPA. For the first time they share in the decision making processes and part of them have joined the MPA board (294 members, 25% of them are women), in addition to 48 women working as MAP collectors.

Additionally, Bedouin women were involved in the establishment of SKP MAP value chain common goals and action plan. They play a critical role in all public awareness and environmental education programs and activities. Furthermore, there are 6 permanent female Bedouin members of the Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) program.

The above improvements will support future opportunities for political participation and rights.

FINANCIAL RIGHTS & ECONOMIC

PRIVILEGES:

Equality in Resources

MPA has provided women with raw materials and tools. They now have better opportunity to access markets through the MPA Fair Trade outlets and participation in exhibitions.

New technologies have been introduced, such as the use of gas ovens and cylinders as well as cultivation training.

54 Bedouin women have also received microloans through the Revolving Fund and 55 women have been trained through the Handicrafts Program.

The above shows that women are in the forefront of strengthening their own business framework and gaining access to resources through the Revolving Fund.

SOCIAL RIGHTS:

Equality in Civil Rights

The Bedouin customary law is a complex issue and does not have enough flexibility to cope with differentials. However, any forward movement in women's situation in the community will support future enhancements of their position in customary law.

For the first time, with the support of the MPCP, Bedouin women have participated in drafting tribal laws through their engagement in the CBNRM program and are members of the Green Gold Association for MAP collectors.

294 women are members of the MPA with three full-time employees and 55 part-time employees.

Currently, Bedouin women have gained more control over their household: they are gaining a better position in their houses due to their contribution in the household income.

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The MPCP works to Conserve Global Biodiversity by Developing Local Communities

