Environmental Impact Assessment for Tel Al Tel Al Arbin, Northern Shuna (Jordan River KBA)

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Executive summary

BAWCS was awarded a small grant from CEPF to implement a project "Integrated ecosystem management of Tel Al Arbin special conservation area". The project site falls within the Jordan River KBA, and seeks planning and participatory implementation of a set of systematic interventions to reduce the deterioration of the quality of water within the estuary runoff zeklab Valley in Jordan river, by intervening upstream through protection programme by the local community in the region and integration with nature conservation programme of the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature to conserve *Acacia Albida*, and the surrounding riberian habitat. The A.albida stand in the area is the last for Jordan and represents a unique Acacia stand ecosystem.

The project also includes a local developmental initiative for sustainable agriculture related to soil and water quality in the River Jordan and linked to awareness programme and capacity building of the community surrounding the site in order to achieve a balance between environmental, social and economic dimensions. The socioeconomic activities planned for this project are relevant to the local communities and are represented in the developing a sustainable agricultural practices using hydroponic techniques and other fertilizers free agriculture using plastic houses for planting vegetables. Since the project plans a construction of plastic houses, it triggers the EIA safe guard policy, hence BAWSC is submitting this Environmental impact statement, that will ensure all potential and important significant impacts on the receiving environment are taken into account at the earliest possible time.

Project description

The project comes in response to a significant deterioration of the ecosystem and biodiversity of estuary of zeklab valley within the Jordan Valley, especially the Acacia small stand and being the sole representation of this kind in Jordan with poses huge challenges surrounding the site in land use and agricultural activities resulting in the use of pesticides and fertilizers and increase pollution of water stream in the valley, the area is also exposed to negative practices of waste dumping and all are in the end finds its way to the Jordan River, originally heavily deteriorated.

The area is of special interest by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature which plans to designate the site to be a special conservation area to be managed by local communities in the site. Local partners have agreed to implement a local initiative to protect the valley and Acacia stand through a participatory management that ensures effective intervention to mitigate impacts and challenges with the strengthening of the role of BAWSC of a in the development project for participatory management of the valley and linked to sustainable local development initiative for land uses.

The project aims to deal with the problem of ecosystem deterioration and biodiversity of zeqlab valley, and protection of the Acacia stand, caused by poor land uses, in particular with regard to non-sustainable agricultural activity, based on the depletion of the natural resources of soil, air and water resources with its attendant challenges directly affect the Acacias such as wood collection and the dumping of waste. The project will contribute to the biodiversity conservation

program sponsored by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, taking into account the developmental role of BAWSC.

The project aims to develop a pilot model for participatory management of zkolab Valley and protection of *Acacias albida* and bind it to a local development initiative for sustainable agriculture, through development of an integrated management plan for the valley and participatory planning of land use, and developing a sustainable economic initiative based on the principles of integrated management and sustainable agriculture.

Policy, legal, and administrative framework

Legal requirements will be reviewed and applicable laws and regulations will be identified in a separate section. The following national legal requirements have been identified so far:

Laws

- Environment Protection Law No. (52) for the year 2006
- Water Authority Law No. 18 for the year 1988
- Ministry of Agriculture Law No. 44 for the year 2002
- Renewable Energy & Energy Efficiency Law No. 3 of the year 2010
- Natural resources Authority Laws 2002
- Public Heath Law No. 47 for the year 2008
- Civil Defense Law No. (18) for the year 1999
- Traffic Law No. (49) for the year 2008
- Labor Law No. (8) for the year 1996
- Anti Trafficking Law No. (9) of the year 2009
- Antiquities Law No. (21) for the year 1988

Regulations

- DESIA Regulation No. 37 for the year 2005
- Air Quality Protection Regulation No. 28 of the year 2005
- Soil Protection Law No. 25 of the year 2005
- Regulation No. 24 of the year for the Management of Hazardous and Dangerous Materials
- Regulation No. 27 for the year 2005 for the Management of Solid Waste
- Underground Water Regulation No. 85 of 2002

Instructions

- Noise Level Control Instructions for the year 2003
- Instruction for the Limitation and Control of Noise for the year 2003

Standards

Ambient Air Quality Standards No. 1140/2006

Other policies, guidelines and procedures requested to be addressed for international organizations funded projects are mostly:

- The Ministry of Environment requirements;
- International Finance Corporation (IFC) requirements that include:
- Environmental, Health and Safety general guidelines
- Environmental, Health and Safety Guidelines for Water and Sanitation

- Performance Standards on Social and Environmental sustainability
- World Bank Operational Policy 4.01 – Environmental Assessment
- World Bank Operational Policy 4.12 – Involuntary resettlement

Environmental baseline

The project area in northern Shuna lies within the KBA boundaries of Jordan River. A flat, open agricultural plain bordering the Jordan River, which along with its tributaries flowing east-west (including Zeqlab Valley) on its east bank are considered biologically important, and is also an important wetland area in the Middle East because it maintains many globally valuable species.

The project site is largely a low lying flat area surrounded by major roads from all sides and occur adjacent to an urban area. Habitat within the block of the project area is monotypic, comprised of lowlying shrubland, similar to the general surrounding areas.

Such habitats support relatively a narrow range of species diversity. The project area being located surrounding an urban area does not therefore represent natural habitats or ecosystem of high biodiversity importance. However, the site is host to the last stand of the indigenous *Acacia Albida*, which is threatened and at the brink of extinction in Jordan, making this tree of national importance.

Environmental impacts

The preliminary ecological assessment provides clear evidence that the site holds significant vegetation community, namely the last stand of *Acacia Albida* in Jordan. No threatened fauna species may occur within the site, due to the limited extent of vegetation and the high level disturbance around the project site.

From an ecological point of view, the construction of the plastic houses as part of the sustainable agricultural practices will result in minimal environmental impact, for the following reasons:

- The proposed site for the construction is not subject to significant environmental constraints;
- The new construction will not have a significant impact on the environmental quality or amenity of the surrounding environment.
- No threatened fauna occur within or around the proposed development site
- The site is an agricultural area where agriculture is the main land use practice

Conclusion

The site for the new construction is not affected by any significant environmental issues. As a result environmental and amenity impacts from the new development are negligible.

No violations of environmental protection laws at the national level are anticipated.

If the project does not proceed, it is unlikely that programs aimed at eradicating mal agricultural practices would be undertaken, thus increasing the likelihood of further deterioration of the habitat.

Retaining the Tel Arbin site as agricultural land with sustainable practices and ensuring local communities co- management of the site is likely to have a positive impact on declaring the site as a special conservation area.