



IUCN
REGIONAL
CONSERVATION
FORUM 2024
KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA



IUCN West Asia Regional Conservation Forum 2024

9-11 September / Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



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IUCN West Asia Regional Conservation Forum

The 10th IUCN ROWA Regional Conservation Forum (RCF) took place from 9 to 11 September 2024 in Riyadh, hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

This forum served as a crucial platform for IUCN Members, including governments, NGOs, and indigenous peoples' organizations to engage with each other, to discuss and debate key conservation issues, to prepare and plan for effective programs, and to address membership matters and business. It also aimed to enhance knowledge sharing and networking among biodiversity conservation actors across the region.

In addition, it served as an opportunity to initiate discussions on regional participation in the next IUCN Congress 2025. The forum uniquely prepares members for the Congress by discussing key deadlines, drafting the IUCN Programme, and providing updates on the Motion process and the implementation of IUCN Resolutions and Recommendations.

Held every four years and overall, the IUCN Regional Forums aim to enhance the management of our natural environment to support human, social, and economic development.





Introduction

The IUCN 10th Regional Conservation Forum for West Asia gathered a diverse group of stakeholders, including government representatives, conservationists, researchers, and community leaders. This forum aimed to address the pressing conservation challenges in West Asia while fostering collaboration and sharing innovative solutions.

Objectives of the Forum

The primary objectives of the forum included:

1. **IUCN West Asia members engagement:** Engage and agree with ROWA members for the IUCN new programme.
2. **Promoting Regional Cooperation:** To enhance partnerships among countries for collective biodiversity conservation efforts.
3. **Sharing Best Practices:** To facilitate knowledge exchange on effective conservation strategies and projects across the region.
4. **Addressing Climate Change:** To discuss the impacts of climate change on biodiversity and explore adaptive management practices.
5. **Strengthening Policy Frameworks:** To encourage the development of robust policies that support environmental sustainability.



Key Themes

Throughout the forum, several key themes emerged:

1. **Climate Resilience and Biodiversity:** Sessions explored the impact of climate change on West Asia's ecosystems, focusing on strategies to strengthen ecosystem resilience and adaptive capacity.
2. **Community-Led Conservation:** The forum highlighted the critical role of local communities in conservation efforts, with successful grassroots initiatives serving as powerful examples of how community involvement drives lasting environmental impact.
3. **Sustainable Development:** A major theme centered around aligning economic development with environmental conservation, emphasizing the promotion of sustainable practices across various sectors to ensure long-term ecological balance.
4. **Transboundary Cooperation:** The need for cross-border collaboration to safeguard shared natural resources and habitats was emphasized, with discussions on how regional cooperation is key to addressing complex environmental challenges.
5. **Innovative Technology in Conservation:** Participants discussed the role of cutting-edge technology in advancing conservation efforts, from enhanced data collection and monitoring to raising public awareness and fostering informed decision-making.



Pre RCF Trainings

Ahead of the 10th IUCN Regional Conservation Forum (RCF), a series of pre-forum training sessions were held to strengthen participants' knowledge on key conservation topics.

The Nature-based Solutions (NbS) workshop is focusing on strategic planning and implementation, with ongoing discussions centered around the ALMURUNA project, which aims to build climate resilience through enhanced water security in the MENA region. Participants are tackling sector-specific challenges and exploring how to effectively integrate NbS into local contexts.

At the same time, the IUCN Green List of Protected Areas session is providing participants with a detailed overview of the 17 Green List criteria, emphasizing the importance of good governance, sound design, and effective management to achieve measurable conservation outcomes.

Additionally, the "Towards a Global Ambition on Land Restoration" session is underway, exploring ecosystem restoration efforts in the Arab region, with insights into the G20 Global Land Initiative and innovative platforms like the G20 Global Restoration Information Hub. A roundtable discussion is focusing on training needs related to land degradation, monitoring, and sustainable restoration.

Nature-based Solutions Training

IUCN Regional Office for West Asia (ROWA) and the National Center for Wildlife (NCW) kicked off a two-day training workshop on Nature-based Solutions (NbS) in Riyadh, part of the lead-up to the IUCN ROWA Regional Conservation Forum from 9 to 11 September 2024.

Bringing together local and regional experts from government, private, and civil society sectors, the workshop explored practical ways to address pressing environmental challenges like water management, climate change, and ecosystem restoration.



Day two saw participants engage in discussions on NbS standards, design steps, and best practices both locally and globally.

Key topics included integrating NbS into policies, strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration, enhancing financial mechanisms, and emphasizing community involvement. The Al Murunah project was highlighted as a successful example of community-driven NbS, showcasing its sustainability and scalability, particularly in sustainable agriculture.





Protected Areas Introductory Training of the Green List



Over 50 participants attended the "Protected Areas Introductory Training of the Green List Standard" hosted by IUCN ROWA and the National Center for Wildlife.

This session, part of the Pre-Regional Conservation Forum, offered a deep dive into the IUCN's Green List of Protected Areas, including the 17 Green List criteria, governance, and management strategies. The training emphasized achieving measurable conservation outcomes and addressed the challenges faced in West Asia.

Towards a Global Ambition on Land Restoration: Challenges and Opportunities in the MENA Region



IUCN ROWA, in partnership with the National Center for Wildlife (NCW), hosted a vital training session today titled "Towards a Global Ambition on Land Restoration: Challenges and Opportunities in the MENA Region" as part of the Pre-Regional Conservation Forum Trainings in Riyadh. This workshop aimed to enhance participants' understanding of ecosystem restoration concepts and approaches, alongside the 10 flagships on ecosystem restoration.

Participants also engaged in insightful discussions about the G20 Global Land Initiative and explored data and knowledge platforms for land monitoring. The session highlighted the region's training needs in capacity-building programs focused on land degradation, monitoring, and restoring degraded ecosystems.



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“Pre Event Trainings”

Day 1

IUCN Regional Conservation Forum for West Asia Opened in Riyadh. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, represented by the National Center for Wildlife (NCW), hosted IUCN's 10th Regional Conservation Forum (RCF) for West Asia from September 9-11, 2024, in Riyadh. Under the theme "West Asia Conservation Actions for a Sustainable Future", the event brought together IUCN members, donors, government agencies, conservation organizations, and local communities to address environmental challenges in the region.





The forum commenced with opening remarks by H.E. Eng. Abdulrahman Abdulmohsen AlFadley, Minister of Environment, Water, and Agriculture of Saudi Arabia, and H.E. Razan Al Mubarak, President of IUCN. The ceremony also featured video presentations showcasing the efforts and achievements of the National Center for Wildlife and IUCN, setting the stage for the discussions to follow.



"The forum is key to evaluating our joint efforts and defining strategic directions to tackle environmental challenges over the next 20 years. Significant achievements in our environmental protection efforts include creating new reserves, implementing advanced water management strategies, and enhancing conservation programs for endangered species."

- IUCN President, H.E Razan Al Mubarak



"The IUCN Forum is a key platform for networking, knowledge exchange, and strategic planning, strengthening global efforts toward sustainable development goals. Environmental conservation is central to Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, and the Saudi Green Initiative and Middle East Green Initiative demonstrate the Kingdom's leadership in environmental action and regional cooperation. Saudi Arabia proudly leads with the 30x30 goal, aiming to protect 30% of its land and marine areas, setting a global benchmark."

- Dr. Mohammed Qurban, CEO of the National Center for Wildlife



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The Union as the Voice of Nature: IUCN Strategic Vision Dialogue

In her opening remarks, H.E. Dr. Grethel Aguilar, Director General of IUCN, introduced the IUCN Strategic Vision Dialogue, centered on the Union's 20-year vision and financial plan to tackle the pressing biodiversity and climate crises.

This session highlighted IUCN's goals to enhance ecosystem resilience, improve the management of protected areas, and embed biodiversity considerations into global policies by 2030. The high-level panel featured Her Royal Highness Princess Bassma Bint Ali of Jordan, H.E. Eng. Abdulrahman Abdulmohsen AlFadley, Minister of Environment, Water, and Agriculture of Saudi Arabia, H.E. Dr. Yasmine Fouad, Egypt's Minister of Environment, and led by Dr. Hany El Shaer, Regional Director of IUCN ROWA.





"The 30x30 initiative, a cornerstone of the Saudi Green Initiative announced in 2021, sets an ambitious target to plant 10 billion trees and conserve 40 million hectares of land and marine environments, ensuring that 30% of Saudi Arabia's natural ecosystems are protected by 2030."

- Eng. Abdulrahman AlFadley, Minister of Environment, Water, and Agriculture



"We must strengthen partnerships between IUCN members to achieve our common goals and leverage the region's wealth of educated and mindful youth; both essential in building a more sustainable future."

- H.E. Razan Al Mubarak, IUCN President



"The biodiversity of the West Asia region is both rich and unique. Today, we gather to discuss how to best protect and preserve it. This forum is an opportunity to celebrate past successes, share experiences, and plan for future conservation efforts."

- Dr. Grethel Aguilar Director General of IUCN



"IUCN is broadening its focus to encompass eight critical areas: nature-positive financial and economic systems, climate resilience, food security, sustainable agriculture, health, energy transitions, sustainable cities, and the renewable 'blue' economy. This also includes water management and combating drought and desertification."

- Dr. Hany El Shaer IUCN ROWA Regional Director



"Effectively managing biodiversity challenges alongside development activities is essential. Engaging stakeholders, including local communities and landowners, is vital. Addressing their concerns, alongside environmental issues, greatly impacts the preservation of our natural surroundings."

- H.E. Dr. Yasmine Fouad Egypt's Minister of Environment



IUCN Programme 2026-2029

The IUCN Programme 2026-2029 session, provided an in-depth overview of the upcoming programme's key priorities and strategic goals designed to address global conservation challenges.

The session explored how the programme aligns with current environmental needs and the pivotal roles that IUCN members and partners will play in its successful implementation. Speakers included H.E. Dr. Muhammad Qurban from the National Center for Wildlife in Saudi Arabia, H.E. Dr. Sheikha AlDhaheeri from the Environment Agency in Abu Dhabi, Ms. Shereefa Al Salem from the Environment Public Authority in Kuwait, Dr. Stewart Maginnis from IUCN, and H.E. Dr. Jihad AlSawair, Secretary General of Jordan's Ministry of Environment. The session was moderated by Mr. Sean Southey, Chair of IUCN's Commission on Education and Communication, and led by Mr. Mark Salway, IUCN's Chief Operations Officer.





"The Kingdom's environmental strategy has seen accelerated development, operating within an integrated framework aligned with the IUCN Programme 2026-2029. Our ongoing efforts aim to achieve the 30x30 goal by 2030."

-Dr. Mohammad Qurban, CEO of The National Center for Wildlife



"The strategies of Abu Dhabi's Environment Agency align closely with the IUCN Programme 2026-2029. Our initiatives not only address biodiversity conservation but also explore the critical relationship between people and nature."

- Dr. Sheikha AlDhaheeri, Managing Director & Board Member of Abu Dhabi's Environment Agency



"Kuwait works in close partnership with IUCN to enhance policies aimed at combating habitat destruction and other environmental challenges. This forum is invaluable, bringing together regional and global experts with the knowledge and expertise to address these pressing issues."

- Ms. Shereefa Al Salem Kuwait Environment Public Authority



"We're building on the foundations we've already established, and we'll continue to do so. However, it's also important to reflect on how much IUCN has already accomplished."

- Dr. Stewart Maginnis, Deputy Director General of IUCN



"Today, I have a renewed call to action for Saudi Arabia and the region: we must urgently step up efforts to protect nature and address the biodiversity and climate crisis with everything at our disposal."

- Mr. Mark Salway, Chief Operations Officer, IUCN



"The IUCN Programme 2026-2029 provides a clear path to tackling critical conservation challenges. Collective action and active engagement are key to turning this vision into reality."

- Mr. Sean Southey, Chair, IUCN Commission on Education and Communication



Integrating Agriculture, Managing Water & Climate Resilience for Food Security

This session explored the Water, Energy, Food Security, and Ecosystem Nexus (WEFE) as a strategic approach to building climate resilience and achieving sustainable development. Led by Dr. Marwan Al Raggad, Executive Director of the Inter-Islamic Network on Water Resources Development and Management (INWRDAM), Jordan, and moderated by Dr. Ayman Rabi, IUCN Regional Councillor for West Asia, Palestine, the discussion focused on integrating agriculture with water management to enhance food security amid the challenges posed by climate change.

Key contributions came from Dr. Saif Alharbi of the Ministry of Agriculture, Saudi Arabia; Dr. Amgad Elmahdi, Regional Director of the Green Climate Fund, Australia; Eng. Mohamad Al Dwairi, Secretary General for Strategic Planning Affairs at the Ministry of Water and Irrigation, Jordan; and Dr. Reem Nejdawi, Chief of Food and Environment Policies, Climate Change & Natural Resource Sustainability Cluster at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Lebanon. The panelists collectively stressed the need for a sustainable transition to ensure food security while building resilient communities, offering insights into overcoming water management and food security challenges.





"Overcoming Jordan's environmental challenges in energy and agriculture requires integrating water, energy, and agriculture policies as interconnected resources. With sound financial management, this approach will drive positive environmental transformation."

— Eng. Mohamad Al Dwairi, Secretary General for Strategic Planning Affairs, Jordan's Ministry of Water



"At the Islamic Network of Water Resources Development and Management, we lead by example, showing that sustainability goals are attainable for the West Asian region. By embracing a holistic, innovative, and adaptable approach, we tackle challenges through the Water, Energy, Food Security, and Ecosystem Nexus."

— Dr. Marwan Al Raggad, Executive Director, INWRDAM, Jordan



"Addressing climate resilience requires a holistic approach that connects water, energy, and agriculture. By fostering collaboration and innovative solutions, we can ensure sustainable development and build resilient communities."

— Dr. Amgad Elmahdi, Regional Director, Green Climate Fund



"At the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, we take a proactive approach by centering our efforts around the Water, Energy, Food Security, and Ecosystem Nexus. This integrated strategy is set to drive meaningful transformation within our existing frameworks."

— Dr. Reem Nejdawi, Chief of Food and Environment Policies, Climate Change & Natural Resource Sustainability Cluster, UNESCWA, Lebanon



"Sustainable agriculture and effective water management are key to building climate resilience and ensuring food security for our communities."

— Dr. Ayman Rabi, IUCN Regional Councillor for West Asia, Palestine



Rooting For Change: Building Dryland Resilience through Ecosystem Restoration

Led by Emad Adly, the session focused on empowering local communities in ecosystem restoration. Discussions emphasized the critical role of community-led initiatives in restoring degraded ecosystems and addressing challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation.

Panelists, including Dr. Grethel Aguilar, Wael A Bushah, Dr. Mohammad El Vilaly, H.E. Mohammad Hyari and Eng. Maher Al-Gothmi, shared insights into how restoration efforts not only helped heal ecosystems but also fostered traditional knowledge and enhanced long-term stewardship by local populations.

The session, moderated by Prof. Said Damhoureyeh, IUCN Regional Councillor for West Asia, highlighted the importance of involving communities in decision-making and resource management to achieve sustainable and lasting impact.





"In empowering local communities for ecosystem restoration, we recognize that their traditional knowledge and active participation are vital. Community-led initiatives not only heal degraded ecosystems but also foster stewardship and resilience in the face of challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss."

— Dr. Grethel Aguilar, IUCN Director General



"Jordan, one of the driest countries globally, has made significant progress in afforestation. In just two years, we established 10 new forests, showcasing the impact of our sustainable development initiatives."

— H.E. Mohammad Hyari, Secretary General, Ministry of Agriculture, Jordan



"Our collaboration with local communities provides invaluable insights into environmental challenges and solutions. An advisory board of community members has been central to our success."

— Eng. Maher Al-Gothmi, CEO of King Abdulaziz Royal Nature Reserve Development Authority



"Local communities are instrumental in ecosystem restoration. By integrating government, private, and non-profit sectors, we can significantly enhance local engagement and conservation awareness."

— Wael Bushah, CEO, Vegetation Cover Development Foundation, Saudi Arabia



"Addressing land degradation requires a collaborative effort that unites governments, communities, and organizations. Together, we can implement effective strategies that restore our ecosystems and ensure sustainable development for future generations."

— Dr. Mohammad El Vilaly, Programme Officer at the UNCCD, Germany



"Community-led restoration is key to building resilient ecosystems, ensuring sustainable solutions rooted in local knowledge."

— Prof. Said Damhoureyeh, IUCN Regional Councillor for West Asia



Day 2

Regional Thematic Priorities – Parallel Sessions

Day 2 of the IUCN Regional Conservation Forum, held on September 10, 2024, brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, including policymakers, environmentalists, and community leaders, to engage in meaningful discussions on critical environmental challenges facing the West Asia region. With a focus on collaborative solutions, the day featured a series of panel discussions that addressed pressing issues such as biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, land degradation, and innovative financing strategies. The sessions aimed to foster knowledge sharing, highlight successful initiatives, and explore opportunities for enhanced cooperation among countries in the region. Below is an overview of the key themes and discussions that unfolded throughout the day.





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Achieving 30 by 30 for Marine & Terrestrial Protected and Conserved Areas

This session examined how the IUCN Programme Nature 2030 aligns with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, specifically focusing on Target 3, which seeks to conserve 30% of terrestrial, inland water, coastal, and marine areas by 2030.

Mr. Abdullath Talasat, Director of Protected Areas at the National Center for Wildlife (NCW), Saudi Arabia, emphasized the critical importance of sound design and planning for protected areas, which span over 600,000 square kilometers in the country. He cautioned that aiming for the 30% conservation target requires comprehensive planning to ensure sustainability.

Dr. Nehan Arpa, an international expert from Turkey, stressed the need for establishing a connected network of protected areas, explaining that without such connections, the capacity to support vulnerable species diminishes. Dr. Hind Al Ameri, a marine conservation scientist from the UAE, highlighted the importance of assessing trends and evaluating the status of high-biodiversity areas before initiating the design of new reserves.

Eng. Natalia Boulad led the session with an emphasis on creating ecologically representative, well-connected, and equitably governed areas that respect indigenous territories. Meanwhile, Eng. Belal Qutaishat, Director of Nature Conservation Directorate at the Ministry of Environment, Jordan, underlined that verifying the effectiveness of management strategies is more important than simply achieving percentage goals.

Dr. Huda Omar, Advisor to the Egyptian Minister of Environment, highlighted the significance of involving local communities and integrating traditional knowledge with modern conservation practices to foster resilient ecosystems that benefit both nature and people.

Finally, Dr. James Hardcastle, Head of the Global Protected and Conserved Areas Team at IUCN, Switzerland, stressed the importance of turning Act30 into reality, noting that while much attention is given to creating effective protected areas, striking a balance between conservation goals and practical outcomes remains crucial.





Towards Enhancing Climate Resilience & Adaptive Capacity in West Asia

This session explored ROWA's contributions to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in West Asia, focusing on key adaptation and mitigation projects within water and climate change programs, and the challenges of achieving climate resilience and energy transition.

Dr. Mirja Michalscheck (IWMI) discussed scaling innovative solutions to enhance local communities' climate resilience, particularly in water management. Dr. Rachel Asante (IUCN) addressed the role of energy transition in climate resilience and biodiversity conservation, while highlighting the associated socio-economic challenges.



Ms. Suzan Al Ajjawi (Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture, Saudi Arabia) provided an update on West Asia's progress in climate change mitigation and adaptation, focusing on NDC reporting and national climate action. Mr. Tareq Abu Talib (WADI) shared examples of ecological restoration projects in Jordan, implemented with community participation.

Dr. Bassim Al Saleh (GreenTech) identified barriers to a just energy transition in West Asia, including financing and policy issues, while presenting interdisciplinary business models under the WEFE Nexus. Eng. Ali Hayajneh (IUCN) concluded with a focus on climate projections in Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, emphasizing water stress and the need for regional cooperation to address climate impacts on ecosystems and development.

This session highlighted the need for integrated, community-driven solutions to ensure a just and effective climate response across West Asia.





Land Degradation and Desertification: Challenges and Opportunities

The session addressed significant challenges posed by land degradation, with projections indicating that 10-20% of drylands may become more arid by the century's end. It examined the connections between land degradation and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 15 (Life on Land), emphasizing the role of innovative approaches and remote sensing technologies in combating desertification.

Dr. Laith Al Rahahleh led the discussions on effective land-management techniques, while Dr. Abdullah Alhajoj, Director of the Botanical Gardens at the National Center for Vegetation Cover (NCVC), highlighted the NCVC's involvement in various initiatives, including the upcoming COP16 in Riyadh from December 2 to 13, 2024.



Dr. Reem Nejdawi from UN ESCWA emphasized the strategic importance of SDG 15, noting its impact on vulnerable populations, especially women and the poor. Dr. Mohamed Abd Salam El Vilaly from the UNCCD-G20 stressed the need for global cooperation and innovative financial mechanisms for sustainable land management.

Dr. Raha Hakimdavar from Georgetown University highlighted the value of satellite data for monitoring land degradation and guiding restoration efforts, while Dr. Fadel El Zubi from the FAO emphasized the connection between land degradation and food security. The session underscored the urgency of addressing land degradation and the need for collaborative, innovative solutions to foster sustainable development in the region.





Innovative Strategies for Sustainable Development in West Asia

Moderated by Mr. Vivek Menon, IUCN Regional Councillor for South and East Asia, the session centered on the intersection of finance and nature, highlighting the necessity for innovative financial mechanisms to support biodiversity conservation, combat land degradation, and ensure sustainable land use.

The session featured key speakers, including:

- H.E Razan Al Mubarak, President of IUCN, United Arab Emirates
- H.E Dr. Muhammad Qurban, CEO of the National Center for Wildlife, Saudi Arabia
- Dr. Amgad Elmahdi, Regional Director of the Green Climate Fund, Australia
- Dr. Nedal Al Ouran, Head of the Environment, Climate Change & Disaster Risk Reduction Portfolio at UNDP, Jordan
- Dr. Ibrahim Khader, Regional Director of Birdlife, Jordan



Throughout the discussion, speakers underscored the importance of strategic financial solutions in addressing critical environmental issues across the region. They emphasized that effective funding approaches are essential for fostering sustainable development and ensuring the resilience of ecosystems in West Asia. The session concluded with a call to action for collaboration among stakeholders to enhance the capacity for innovative financing initiatives, thereby securing a sustainable future for the region's natural resources.





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Enhancing Area-Based Conservation: IUCN's Green List and The World Heritage

The session titled "Enhancing Area-Based Conservation: IUCN's Green List and The World Heritage" explored the synergies between these two vital global programs. The discussion showcased progress in West Asia and featured insights from site representatives sharing their conservation journeys.

Mr. James Hardcastle, Head of the Global Protected and Protected Areas team at IUCN, emphasized the collaboration between the IUCN Green List and the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in enhancing protected areas. Ms. Katherine Zischka, World Heritage Conservation Officer at IUCN, highlighted the World Heritage Outlook, noting that out of 1,223 global sites, 81 are located in West Asia, including 6 natural sites.



Dr. Stephen Browne from the Royal Commission for AlUla discussed conservation efforts in AlUla, aiming for all six nature reserves to achieve Green List status. Eng. Abdulaziz Al-Ghamdi from the National Center for Wildlife shared that the Ibex Reserve and Uruq Bani Ma'arid are progressing towards the Green List Standard.

Dr. Ahmad Al Malki from the King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Royal Natural Reserve Authority highlighted significant advances in achieving Green List status, including extensive documentation and stakeholder collaboration. Mr. Tilman Jaeger emphasized the World Heritage Convention as a crucial framework for protecting natural and cultural assets.

Dr. Khalid Allam stressed the Green List's role in transforming protected areas into well-managed sites aligned with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Dr. Tamer Khafaga concluded by emphasizing the importance of ongoing support for sites throughout the Green List process, ensuring effective long-term conservation.





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Application of the WEF E Nexus Approach in Water and Agriculture Sectors

The session showcased the SMART DESART initiative, which employs soilless agriculture in Jordan, and aligned it with IUCN's Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems (WEFE) Nexus approach across the MENA region. A presentation and accompanying video provided insight into practical applications of the WEFE Nexus, emphasizing its interdisciplinary nature and the benefits of integrating these components for sustainable development.

Dr. Basim Al Saleh discussed the critical interconnectedness of the WEFE components, stressing the necessity for comprehensive management of natural resources to achieve sustainability. Dr. Marwan Alraggad from INWRDAM elaborated on regional partnerships that are pivotal for implementing the WEFE Nexus Hub vision, sharing specific examples of how these collaborations enhance the water, energy, and agriculture sectors.



Eng. Khalid Al-Hessa highlighted the importance of climate-smart agriculture technologies as emerging trends for both small and large farmers, underscoring IUCN's role in promoting the nexus approach through various initiatives. Eng. Mohammad Al Dwairi from Jordan's Ministry of Water and Irrigation shared insights on the potential of non-conventional water resources as vital inputs for WATER Nexus initiatives, emphasizing the need to incorporate this approach into national strategies and policies.

Dr. Adil Abdelnour from the National Research and Development Center for Sustainable Agriculture (Estidamah) outlined Saudi Arabia's ambitious initiatives to adapt to climate change, including the Saudi Green Initiatives. He pointed out that the Water Demand Management (WDM) approach plays a crucial role in enhancing the WEFE Nexus, particularly in Saudi Arabia.





Sustainable Land Management Practices (SLM) for Resilient Ecosystems

The session highlighted the vital role of Sustainable Land Management (SLM) in fostering sustainable food production, efficient water management, and combating land degradation and desertification. SLM practices contribute not only to climate adaptation but also to ecosystem resilience and biodiversity preservation.

Dr. Raha Hakimdavar from Georgetown University addressed the pressing issue of desertification in drylands, linking it to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 (No Poverty) and 15 (Life on Land). She discussed innovative approaches and the use of remotely sensed data for effective monitoring and combating desertification.



Emphasizing the importance of protected areas, Dr. Ahmed Ibrahim Alboug, General Manager at the National Center for Wildlife in Saudi Arabia, stressed the need for community engagement throughout the conservation process to ensure sustainability and enhance biodiversity.

Dr. Matrah Al-Mutairi, Associate Researcher at the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, noted that 11% of Kuwait's land is designated as protected, with 12 areas officially declared in 2016. She highlighted the crucial role of scientific institutions in monitoring the restoration of degraded lands. Mr. Tariq Abu Taleb, CEO of WADI for Sustainable Restoration in Jordan, shared insights on the benefits of involving local communities in restoration efforts, which enhance livelihoods, improve land ethics, and protect watersheds.

Mr. Jamal Alfayez, General Director of the Hashemite Fund for Development of Jordan Badia, reported that 82% of Jordan is desert, receiving less than 200 mm of annual rainfall. To address these environmental challenges, the Fund has implemented innovative water harvesting techniques. Finally, Dr. Mohamed Draz introduced the HERD project in Egypt, which aims to establish the first law for sustainable rangeland management, outlining responsibilities and frameworks for effective utilization.





IUCN Commissions Main Achievements

Moderated by Mr. Sean Southey, Chair of the Commission on Education and Communication (CEC), this 75-minute session convened influential figures from various IUCN Commissions to discuss their key achievements and future strategies for advancing conservation efforts.



Insights were shared by several prominent speakers:

- Ms. Angela Andrade, Chair of the Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM), emphasized the importance of integrated ecosystem management in promoting biodiversity and sustainable development.
- Mr. Ehab Eid, Regional Vice-Chair of the Species Survival Commission (SSC), outlined strategies for species conservation, focusing on innovative approaches to combat the threats facing vulnerable species.
- Mr. Nizar Hani, Regional Vice-Chair of the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), discussed the critical role of protected areas in safeguarding biodiversity and highlighted successful management practices.
- Mr. Firas Abd-Alhadi, Co-Chair of Nature Education for Sustainability and Regional Vice-Chair of the CEC, shared insights on the importance of education in fostering a conservation mindset and promoting sustainable practices among communities.
- Ms. Mahnaz Kadheri, Regional Vice-Chair of the Commission on Environmental, Economic, and Social Policy (CEESP), addressed the intersection of environmental and socio-economic policies, advocating for holistic approaches to environmental governance.
- Dr. Myrna Samman, a member of the Climate Crisis Commission (CCC), highlighted the urgency of addressing climate change impacts through coordinated efforts and innovative solutions.

The session underscored innovative financial strategies and the significant impact of IUCN's various commissions in advancing conservation efforts and tackling pressing environmental challenges.





IUCN West Asia State Members' Achievements in Implementing the IUCN Programme

The session provided a valuable platform for representatives from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, and Kuwait to discuss their conservation contributions and highlight collaborative projects and partnerships. These initiatives align closely with IUCN's global goals and national biodiversity agendas, showcasing a unified approach to advancing conservation across the region.

Mr. Nizar Hani, WCPA Regional Vice Chair, opened the discussion by emphasizing the significance of joint projects that resonate with both IUCN and national biodiversity priorities. Abdullah Alsalem from the National Centre for Wildlife in Saudi Arabia shared that the Kingdom has successfully placed 18.5% of its territory under effective protection. He stressed the importance of building the infrastructure necessary to achieve ambitious conservation goals by 2030.

Ms. Nouf al Wasmi from Bahrain highlighted the Kingdom's commitment to the 30x30 conservation targets. Despite facing challenges, she noted that comprehensive wildlife preservation programs are leading to positive increases in endangered species populations. Additionally, Eng. Belal Qutaishat from Jordan reported significant improvements since the launch of their conservation programs, which adhere to IUCN guidelines. He mentioned plans for ongoing reviews to identify further enhancements.

Ms. Shereefa Al Saleem from Kuwait discussed their focus on understanding the environment, establishing effective conservation frameworks, and fostering international collaboration. She expressed confidence that IUCN's programs are significantly supporting Kuwait's conservation initiatives. Finally, Huda Omar from Egypt reflected on the country's recognition in 2008 of the need for international collaboration to enhance nature conservation efforts. Through active engagement with the IUCN network, Egypt has made substantial strides toward its 2030 goals.

Overall, the session underscored the collaborative spirit among these nations, demonstrating their commitment to advancing conservation efforts and achieving shared biodiversity objectives in the region.





A High-Level Talk Show:

Mainstreaming of Nature-Based Solutions in Policies and Strategies in the MENA Region and Implementation Opportunities

This session focused on the opportunities and potential of Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) in the MENA region, aiming to reconnect people with nature. It brought together political and non-political organizations, environmental NGOs, and the private sector to discuss the adoption and implementation of high-integrity NbS.

During the West Asia's Regional Conservation Forum (RCF) in Riyadh, H.E. Dr. Sheikha Al Dhaheri from the Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi emphasized the need for national strategies for NbS. Dr. Hany El Shaer highlighted NbS as effective approaches to enhance quality of life and resilience in key sectors like agriculture and energy.



Angela Andrade, Chair of the IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management, stressed the importance of collaboration among various stakeholders to strengthen the link between people and nature. H.E. Dr. Jehad Sawair from Jordan noted that NbS can unite institutions to meet climate and biodiversity commitments, highlighting the role of community-based organizations (CBOs).

Dr. Alfredo Redondo emphasized that collaboration with key stakeholders is vital for driving nature-positive initiatives, especially in ecotourism and coral reef restoration. H.E. Dr. Ibrahim Al-Helali concluded that NbS projects should actively engage stakeholders for continuous improvement. Overall, the session highlighted a strong commitment to advancing NbS for sustainable development in the MENA region.

Dr. Mohamed Draz, a professor in Egypt, introduced the HERD project, which aims to establish the first Egyptian law for sustainable rangeland management, outlining responsibilities and frameworks for effective utilization.

Overall, the session highlighted the critical need for integrated SLM practices to enhance food security, ensure ecosystem resilience, and promote sustainable development in the MENA region.





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Showcases in Sustainable Restoration and Management in Drylands Ecosystems

This session showcased successful case studies on dryland restoration, where IUCN members presented innovative projects, practical solutions, and strategies aimed at fostering collaboration and scaling up restoration efforts across the region.

Dr. Abdullah Al Harithi, Manager of Rangeland Restoration at the NCVC, underscored the importance of sustainable rangeland management for biodiversity and ecosystem balance, highlighting the NCVC's commitment to ecological restoration as part of the Saudi Green Initiative for long-term sustainability.



Ms. Kawther S. Al-Shlash, Head of the Nature Conservation Division at the Imam Abdulaziz bin Mohammed Royal Reserve Development Authority, shared how their initiatives align with Saudi Vision 2030 by focusing on biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, and sustainable ecotourism. She noted that local community involvement is enhanced through activities like planting events and cleanups. Additionally, Mr. Mohamed Hassona from the Qur'anic Botanic Garden in Qatar emphasized the garden's dedication to ecosystem enhancement through extensive plant conservation and community awareness programs, fostering sustainable participation in protecting plant heritage.

Mr. James Walsh, Regenerating Program Manager at NEOM in Saudi Arabia, called for large-scale ecological restoration efforts, stressing the need to conserve ecosystems and utilize local native seeds in alignment with best practices. Moreover, Mr. Tariq Abu Taleb from WADI for Sustainable Restoration discussed the role of sustainable land management (SLM) in combating land degradation and adapting to climate change.

Finally, Ms. Maitha AlMansoori from the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi highlighted their successful rehabilitation efforts in Jebel Hafit National Park, resulting in a 25% increase in Samar tree habitat. Razan Zuayter, President of the Arab Group for the Protection of Nature, emphasized the importance of local engagement in sustainable development, reinforcing that environmental awareness is crucial for success. Overall, the session illustrated a strong commitment to innovative restoration practices in dryland environments.





Navigating Ocean Challenges: Strategies for a Sustainable Future in West Asia

The session focused on regional marine priorities in West Asia, addressing unique opportunities and solutions to critical issues affecting the region's seas and coasts. Key topics included marine ecosystem degradation, overfishing, and the impacts of climate change.

Through engaging presentations and panel discussions, participants aimed to identify innovative solutions and collaborative approaches for resilient marine management and sustainable ocean use.



Dr. Ameer A. Eweida, Professor of Marine Conservation Science at the Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences, University of Miami, led this session and emphasized the importance of addressing these challenges for the well-being of marine ecosystems and the communities that rely on them.

Additional speakers included Dr. Dania Abdel Malak, Director of the European Topic Center; Dr. AbdulNasser Qutb, Director of the Marine Program at the National Center for Wildlife in Saudi Arabia; and Ms. Tatiana Antonelli, Director of Goumbouk and the MENA Ocean Initiative.

Together, they explored resilience-based marine management and regenerative growth strategies that support both ecological health and community prosperity in West Asia.





Introducing the Global Species Action Plan (GSAP) and Its Online Knowledge Platform to IUCN Members in West Asia

The session introduced the Global Species Action Plan (GSAP) and its online knowledge platform, GSAP SKILLS, to IUCN members in the region. The GSAP supports the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework by outlining strategic actions for species conservation and providing essential resources, training, and technical guidance for the sustainable management of native wild species.

Led by Ms. Dao Nguyen, Senior Programme Manager of Conservation Action at IUCN, the session demonstrated how these tools can assist countries in updating their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs).



Dr. Nedal Al Ouran from UNDP Jordan emphasized the role of national biodiversity strategies as learning tools and highlighted effective collaboration with IUCN ROWA to ensure that the GSAP complements other government frameworks.

Vivek Menon, IUCN SSC expert for South and South-East Asia, underscored the inherent value of conserving species and the risks associated with their loss, affirming that every species plays a critical role in biodiversity.

Mr. Ehab Eid from IUCN Jordan discussed the diverse contributions of the IUCN SSC, including developing regional action plans, identifying threats, and building local capacity, reinforcing the idea that biodiversity is vital for human survival.

Mr. Mohammed Manea Al Remeithi from the Environment Agency in Abu Dhabi highlighted the importance of collaboration in conservation efforts, sharing a successful initiative to save the scimitar-horned oryx, which has now been relisted as endangered due to cooperative efforts with international organizations and local communities.





Aligning Energy Transition with Nature Positive Approaches

This session addressed the growing impacts of climate change, underscoring the urgent need to accelerate decarbonization and invest in renewable energy, especially wind and solar. The final Global Stocktake COP 28 Decision in Dubai called for states to “triple renewable energy capacity globally,” emphasizing the necessity of protecting ecosystems alongside advancing renewable infrastructure.

Dr. Mohammad Shobrak from the National Center for Conservation in Saudi Arabia discussed the risks overhead powerlines pose to birds and mammals, presenting regional case studies and successful mitigation strategies. In addition, Dr. Tris Allinson of Birdlife International stressed the importance of robust spatial planning and tools like Birdlife Avistep to prevent bird casualties.



Dr. Aonghais Cook examined over 30 years of offshore wind generation, identifying risks to birds and sea mammals while outlining effective mitigation strategies. She also referenced upcoming IUCN guidance on cumulative impacts and responsible sourcing in the renewable energy sector.

Dr. Andrzej Cerglarz from the Renewable Grid Initiative highlighted opportunities for enhancing nature during grid deployment, advocating for integrated vegetative management.

Dr. Ibrahim Khader from Birdlife International, Middle East, discussed the challenges of rapidly deploying renewable energy in the region and identified specific actions needed from IUCN and stakeholders to support nature-positive initiatives.

Dr. Rachel Asante wrapped up by emphasizing that promoting a nature-positive approach is a key outcome of the proposed IUCN program, inviting discussion on essential issues for achieving this goal in the ROWA region.





Launch of Saudi Arabia's Protected Area System Plan

This session marked the launch of Saudi Arabia's updated Protected Area System Plan, the first significant revision since 1990. The updated plan emphasizes comprehensive ecosystem representation, including the 65 identified ecosystem types in the Kingdom, and incorporates species-level analyses focused on areas of high biodiversity. It aims to support the ambitious target of designating 30% of the country as protected by 2030, as outlined in the Saudi Green Initiative and the CBD Kunming-Montreal COP15 agreement.



Mr. James Hardcastle, Head of the Global Protected and Protected Areas team at IUCN, Switzerland, moderated the session.

The new plan serves as a practical guide for achieving these conservation goals while also addressing social aspects relevant to protected area management.

Speakers included:

- Dr. Ahmed Al Boug, National Center for Wildlife, Saudi Arabia
- Mr. Abdallah Altasat, General Manager for Protected Areas, National Center for Wildlife, Saudi Arabia
- Dr. Othman Llewellyn, Environmental Planner, National Center for Wildlife, Department of Protected Area Planning, Saudi Arabia
- Dr. Stuart Williams, Chief Advisor, Protected Areas Directorate, National Center for Wildlife, Saudi Arabia





Conference of the Parties (COP16) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

This session centered on the upcoming Conference of the Parties (COP16) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), set to take place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from December 2 to 13, 2024. COP16 will tackle critical issues related to desertification, land degradation, and drought. As the largest gathering of UNCCD's 197 Parties and the first conference hosted in the Middle East, it aims to showcase innovative solutions and foster collaborative efforts in addressing these pressing challenges.



The session also highlighted the significance of COP16 and provided a preview of the planned events for both the blue and green zones. Mr. Abdulaziz Al-Wosaifer from Saudi Arabia served as the moderator.

Speakers included:

- Eng. Ahmed Alkulaib, Vegetation Center, Saudi Arabia
- Mr. Sultan Al-Harithi, Waste Management Center, Saudi Arabia
- Dr. Ayman Ghulam, CEO of the Meteorological Center, Ministry of Environment, Saudi Arabia





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Day 3

The West Asia Regional Conservation Forum, concluded with a series of impactful sessions that emphasized the importance of conservation science, governance, and collaboration within the IUCN community. Each session served as a vital platform for discussing significant topics such as the ongoing development of IUCN's policy on synthetic biology, preparations for the upcoming World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi, and the implementation of resolutions that drive conservation efforts forward.

Engagement from IUCN members was instrumental in fostering collaboration and aligning regional priorities with global conservation strategies. The forum not only provided an opportunity for knowledge exchange but also highlighted shared goals and actionable strategies for sustainable development in West Asia.





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Science for Conservation in West Asia

The recent session titled "Science for Conservation in West Asia" took place during the Regional Conservation Forum and highlighted significant developments in conservation science within the region. Key topics discussed included IUCN's ongoing development of a policy on synthetic biology, the collaboration between IPBES and IUCN, and a preview of the Agriculture & Conservation flagship report.

The session also focused on the use of the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and data according to IUCN standards. Participants discussed the benefits for members in documenting their contributions on the IUCN Contributions for Nature Platform, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and data sharing in enhancing conservation efforts.

Speakers for the session included:

- Mr. Ehab Eid, Regional Vice-Chair, IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC), Jordan
- Dr. Thomas Brooks, IUCN Chief Scientist
- Eng. Belal Qutaishat, Government of Jordan, IPBES National Focal Point, Jordan
- Mr. James Thompson, Royal Commission Al Ula, Saudi Arabia
- Dr. Shaikha Al Dhaheri, IUCN Council & Environment Agency Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
- Ms. Sarah Over, Senior Membership Engagement Manager, IUCN, Switzerland
- Ms. Ola Mallah, Membership & Regional Director Office Manager, IUCN ROWA, Jordan

The session served as a crucial platform for sharing insights and fostering collaboration among key stakeholders in the conservation community.





IUCN Governance and the Road to Congress

A session was held to focus on preparations for the upcoming IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi, scheduled for October 9-15, 2025. The session covered updates to IUCN Statutes and Regulations, along with a review of statutory requirements necessary for the Congress. Key topics included governance reviews, voting procedures, elections, and important timelines leading up to the event.

The session provided critical information to ensure that participants are well-prepared for the Congress and to familiarize them with the changes in governance structures.

Speakers included:

- Ms. Sarah Over, Senior Membership Engagement Manager, IUCN, Switzerland
- Mr. Vivek Menon, IUCN Regional Councillor for South and East Asia, Wildlife Trust of India
- Mr. Emmanuel Blanchard, Event Partnerships Officer

The session aimed to equip members with the necessary knowledge to engage fully in the Congress and contribute to key decisions shaping IUCN's future.





The IUCN Policy Cycle: From Motions to Resolutions

This session provided a platform for discussing thematic collaboration on priority conservation issues, reviewing current Resolutions, and evaluating progress and challenges in their implementation. Led by Mr. David Goodman, Multilateral Policy Officer at the Centre for Policy and Law, IUCN, the session also offered valuable guidance on how members can actively participate in the motions process for the upcoming Nature Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi, 2025.

The session facilitated discussions on priority themes, reviewed obstacles encountered during the implementation of Resolutions, and provided a space for members to organize around new motions. This collaborative approach aimed to ensure that members are well-prepared and engaged in shaping conservation policies at the Congress.

Speaker:

Mr. David Goodman, Multilateral Policy Officer, Centre for Policy and Law, IUCN, Switzerland.



IUCN 20-Year Vision & 2026-2029 Programme Members Feedback

This session focused on strengthening collaboration between the IUCN Programme and West Asia members for the 2026-2029 cycle. The meeting aimed to align programme objectives with regional conservation priorities, foster knowledge exchange, and develop actionable strategies to tackle both regional and global conservation challenges. Through this session, members engaged in discussions to drive impactful and long-term solutions in the region.

Coordinators:

- Dr. Stewart Maginnis, IUCN Deputy Director General, IUCN, Switzerland
- Dr. Hany El Shaer, Regional Director, IUCN ROWA, Jordan
- Dr. Myrna Samman, a member of the Climate Crisis Commission (CCC), Lebanon
- Mr. Mark Salway, Chief Operations Officer, IUCN, Switzerland





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IUCN will drive transformational change through six catalytic areas

1. Convening and networking
2. Knowledge, science, and data
3. Policy and advocacy
4. Capacity strengthening
5. Mobilising resources for conservation on the ground
6. Strategic communication and awareness building

We will grow Membership and increase our influence and reach



MOBILISE

IUCN Governance

This session led by IUCN Regional Councillors, reflected on the role of IUCN West Asia Regional Councillors, focusing on key challenges, communication with members, and important issues. Discussions emphasized the need to enhance the visibility and voice of the West Asia Region within IUCN, encouraging active participation from members across all constituencies and programs. Clear expectations were set for nominated Councillors, ensuring stronger engagement and representation.

Participants also took time to reflect on their achievements over the past years, identifying areas for improvement and outlining steps towards the IUCN Congress in Abu Dhabi in 2025. The session concluded with the nominations and election of Councillor candidates for the next intersessional period.

Key themes:

Reflections from IUCN West Asia Regional Councillors on their roles, challenges, and communication with members.

Improving visibility and voice of the West Asia Region within IUCN.

Active member participation and expectations for future Councillors.

Nominations and elections for Councillor candidates.





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Youth & Technology Pavilion

The Youth & Tech4Nature Pavilion was supported by the Royal Commission for AlUla, in parallel with the IUCN West Asia Regional Conservation Forum, hosted by the National Center for Wildlife (NCW). This pavilion highlighted the intersection of technology and nature conservation, providing a dynamic space for collaboration and learning.

Visitors participated in technical sessions and explored the exhibition area, which featured a 3D model of the Sharaan Nature Reserve and a virtual reality experience of the reserve. These interactive tools showcased how technology was advancing conservation efforts in AlUla and beyond.

The pavilion served as a collaborative platform where ideas could help shape future conservation efforts. Attendees discovered innovative solutions driving the future of conservation.

Key Sessions Included:

- Remarks by leaders in conservation and technology
- Panel discussions on emerging technologies in nature conservation
- Youth-led sessions exploring innovative conservation solutions
- Presentations on digital tools for biodiversity management and policy-making



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The event concluded with a celebratory session that honored the contributions of all participants. Certificates of appreciation were presented by IUCN's Director General, Dr. Grethel Aguilar, and Dr. Mohammad Qurban, recognizing the collective efforts that made the forum a success. The session reinforced the shared commitment to advancing conservation in the region, serving as a pivotal moment in the journey towards a more resilient and sustainable future for West Asia's biodiversity. The gathering concluded with a group photo, capturing the spirit of collaboration and dedication among all attendees.





The Regional Conservation Forum (RCF) concluded with a strong sense of collective achievement and a renewed commitment to addressing the conservation challenges facing West Asia. The forum fostered collaboration, knowledge exchange, and strategic planning among IUCN members and partners, aligning regional efforts with global biodiversity goals. As the event wrapped up, the discussions and partnerships forged during the RCF were set to shape the future of conservation in the region, driving innovation and collective action toward a more sustainable and resilient future for West Asia's biodiversity.



Outputs & Recommendations

1

Regional Biodiversity Action Plan: Participants developed a comprehensive plan addressing biodiversity loss, outlining specific actions for different countries in the region.

2

Framework for Community Engagement: A guideline was created to enhance community involvement in conservation projects, promoting local knowledge and practices.

3

Strengthening Legal Frameworks: Recommendations included improving legal structures to protect biodiversity, emphasizing enforcement and compliance mechanisms.

4

Capacity Building Programs: The forum highlighted the need for training and resources for stakeholders, ensuring they are equipped to implement effective conservation strategies.

5

Public Awareness Initiatives: Participants advocated for campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity and conservation among the general public.

6

Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms: Establishing systems to track progress on conservation efforts and the implementation of the forum's recommendations was prioritized.



Success Stories & Case Studies

1

Community Engagement in Restoration

This case study highlighted the successful revival of restoration efforts in Jordan through participatory management, emphasizing collaboration and inclusivity in conservation.

- **Participatory Management:** Local communities actively engaged in decision-making regarding restoration strategies, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for environmental stewardship.
- **Integration of Traditional Knowledge:** The initiative utilized traditional ecological knowledge, enhancing the effectiveness and cultural relevance of restoration practices.
- **Capacity Building:** Training sessions empowered community members with skills for sustainable resource management, strengthening resilience against environmental challenges.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Community involvement in data collection allowed for adaptive management responsive to ecological changes.
- **Ecological Outcomes:** Community-driven initiatives led to significant improvements in biodiversity and ecosystem health, benefiting both the environment and local livelihoods.
- **Social Cohesion:** Collaborative efforts fostered social ties and trust among community members, ensuring ongoing commitment to restoration.

2

Sustainable Practices in Agriculture

During the West Asia Regional Conservation Forum 2024, sustainable agriculture emerged as a crucial topic, particularly through the lens of the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems (WEFE) Nexus approach.

- **Climate-smart Agriculture:** Emphasized by Eng. Khalid Al Hessah from the Ministry of Agriculture, these practices enhance productivity while minimizing environmental impact, adapting to climate change.
- **WEFE Nexus Integration:** This interdisciplinary approach promotes a balance between agricultural productivity and sustainable resource management.
- **IUCN's Role:** Various initiatives by IUCN were highlighted to support the adoption of the WEFE Nexus approach, enhancing sustainable agriculture in West Asia.

This case study demonstrates how sustainable agricultural practices can adapt to climate change while supporting food security and environmental protection.

Success Stories & Case Studies

3

Collaborative Protected Areas

This case study examined the establishment and management of collaborative protected areas in the region, showcasing the significance of stakeholder partnerships.

- **Partnership Development:** Collaborations among local communities, government bodies, and NGOs created protected areas that reflect stakeholder interests, fostering mutual respect.
- **Inclusive Governance:** Decision-making processes incorporated local community input, aligning conservation goals with local priorities and enhancing support for initiatives.
- **Capacity Building:** Training programs equipped local communities with skills for effective resource management and conservation.
- **Biodiversity Conservation:** The integration of traditional ecological knowledge with scientific methods contributed to effective management strategies and the recovery of threatened species.
- **Monitoring and Adaptive Management:** Continuous assessments involving community members allowed for adaptive management strategies responsive to ecological changes.
- **Socioeconomic Benefits:** Collaborative protected areas generated economic opportunities through ecotourism and sustainable practices, motivating communities to engage in conservation.
- **Challenges and Resilience:** While challenges such as resource conflicts arose, the collaborative framework proved resilient, facilitating ongoing cooperation through open communication.



Challenges & Future Directions

While celebrating achievements, the forum also acknowledged ongoing challenges:

1

Political and Social Instability: The impact of conflict in certain areas complicates conservation efforts and policy enforcement.

2

Economic Pressures on Biodiversity: Rapid development and urbanization continue to threaten natural habitats, necessitating innovative solutions for sustainable development.

3

Climate Change Adaptation: The urgent need for adaptive strategies to address climate change impacts on ecosystems was a significant concern.

Moving forward, participants emphasized the importance of continued dialogue, sustained funding for conservation projects, and integrating traditional knowledge into modern conservation strategies.

Conclusion

The 10th Regional Conservation Forum (RCF) provided a dynamic and collaborative environment for stakeholders across West Asia to engage in meaningful discussions on pressing conservation challenges. Each panel and session underscored the importance of interdisciplinary approaches, highlighting the integration of traditional knowledge, innovative practices, and collaborative frameworks in achieving sustainable conservation outcomes.

Key themes emerged throughout the forum, including the critical role of community engagement in restoration efforts, the adoption of climate-smart agriculture, and the establishment of collaborative protected areas. These discussions not only emphasized the necessity of inclusivity in governance but also showcased successful case studies that illustrated effective strategies for enhancing biodiversity and fostering resilience among local communities.





As the forum concluded, it became clear that the path forward lies in the continued partnership between governments, local communities, NGOs, and international organizations. The insights and recommendations generated will serve as a foundation for future actions, guiding stakeholders as they work together to address the complex conservation challenges facing the region. Through shared commitment and innovative solutions, West Asia can make significant strides towards a sustainable future, preserving its unique ecosystems for generations to come.



Photo Gallery





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