



# Success Stories from the World's Wetlands



Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.

## Harnessing the essential services of the Paraguay-Parana Rivers

A vast corridor of wetlands and floodplains within the freshwater ecosystem of the Paraguay-Parana Rivers defines the Lower Parana Ecoregion of **Argentina**. The Parana and Paraguay Rivers are “bio-geographic corridors” that provide natural resources and essential services such as food and jobs to several urban centers and towns across the region. These wetlands house migratory fish of high biodiversity value and commercial importance; around 85% of freshwater fish catch in Argentina takes place along the Paraguay-Parana corridor. To promote and conserve these valuable wetlands, UNDP supported the Government to access Global Environment Facility (GEF) funds to strengthen governance frameworks across the provinces. Fisheries policies were coordinated among different jurisdictions, including a new series of harmonized tools, one of which established catch quotas defined by the provinces and export quotas defined by the national government. An inventory was undertaken at a wetlands landscape level, providing the basis for more detailed studies on the region's wetland ecosystems. This work yielded data on the region's freshwater fish and helped determine areas of special importance for fish habitats. The inventory has become one of the essential tools for designing and implementing policies and regulatory frameworks for the conservation of the region's wetlands and their biodiversity, to identify loopholes and priority areas of research, establish protocols and monitoring strategies and plan their use. At the same time, fishers were able to reduce catch and fishing efforts, leading to more sustainable use of these wetlands.

## Protected wetlands, strengthening livelihoods and contributing to resilient growth

Sustainable models of development can eradicate extreme poverty through the management of biodiversity and ecosystems to strengthen livelihoods and support jobs, and other country development priorities, including food and water security and resilience against potential climate change impacts. In **Ecuador**, UNDP and the Ministry of Environment are working together through a project financed by the GEF to leverage the potential of the country's protected areas to contribute to the economy and livelihoods. A financial framework containing new mechanisms that will transform protected areas into revenue sources is being established. At the local level, the Santa Rosa Municipality passed an ordinance to protect the natural resources of *La Tembladera* Ramsar site, investing more than US\$20,000 in 2014 for its conservation. To promote new sustainable mechanisms around *La Tembladera*, 40 partners from five communities united to form the Farmers and Craftsmen Association, which



now manages funds for productive activities that conserve the wetland. These include the production of endemic fish and community-based sustainable tourism activities, including bird and wildlife watching, kayaking, and cultural activities related to the wetland. These interventions have changed perceptions of protected areas: no longer seen as a limiting factor, they are now recognized for the significant and direct contributions to livelihoods and economic growth.

## Two decades of commitment to Uruguay's emblematic wetlands

A series of four successive projects, implemented by the Ministry of Housing, Land Planning and Environment, supported by UNDP, and financed by the GEF, has enabled **Uruguay** to protect some of the most emblematic wetlands and consolidate these into a new protected area system. The first project in the 1990s focused on setting up a Reserve in the *Bañados del Este* Ramsar site with core areas for biodiversity protection. The second project consolidated the Reserve by working on land-use planning in a larger area and setting up a conservation and development programme in the Eastern Wetlands still active today; this work also set the stage for developing a Protected Area System Law at the national level. The third project, completed in 2014, strengthened capacities for implementing the new Protected Areas system, and included a pilot protected area in a second Ramsar site. The fourth and current project expands beyond protected area boundaries and applies a landscape approach to their management; this approach is particularly important for wetlands since their functionality depend on upstream catchments, often beyond the boundaries of conservation areas. In all this work, consultation and collaboration with landowners and communities has been essential. The private sector has been critical to building long-term partnerships for capacity building, for public-private management schemes, and for implementing policies for wetland management in a changing climate.



### Integrated coastal ecosystem management for economic development

Coastal development can be a boon to growing economies, bringing in trade and tourism. For such development to be sustainable, however, it must include investment in the management of ecosystem goods and services. In **Jordan**, rapid economic growth in the city of Aqaba has placed pressures on the diverse, but limited, coastal resources of the Gulf of Aqaba and its Marine Park, which stretches seven kilometers along the beautiful coast. With support from UNDP and GEF finance, the Government of Jordan and partners are striving for more effective and integrated management of this coastal zone for the benefit of the economy and its people. The expansion of the ports in Aqaba, in particular, have threatened the extensive coral reefs that fringe the coastline, attract local and international tourists, and play a fundamental role in the marine ecosystem. UNDP and marine park staff successfully translocated the threatened coral, thus preventing the loss and insuring the protection of this economically important species. The project team has also initiated the first ever fish stock assessment, which will provide the commercial fishing community with information needed to ensure the sustainable use of their fisheries. Although the fisheries sector in the Jordanian Gulf of Aqaba is small and artisanal, this assessment could reveal the potential for growth, based on the productivity of the marine ecosystem, and inform the development of a Sustainable Fisheries Management and Monitoring Plan for the area.

### Delivering multiple development benefits through the protection of peatlands

Destruction and degradation of peatlands can lead to the release of greenhouse gases, with a global warming potential that is equivalent to 13-30% of the global emissions from fossil fuel combustion. UNDP-supported GEF-financed projects have been working to protect the carbon stored in peatlands, while also enhancing their ability to buffer communities from intensified floods, droughts and fires. In **Belarus**, UNDP has assisted the Ministry of Forestry in 'greening' the peat mining industry by restoring 28,207 hectares of degraded peatlands, raising water levels at 15 sites and changing government policies. Restoring these degraded peatlands has delivered

multiple development dividends: preventing annual emissions of about 270,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide; enabling better conditions for picking cranberries and fishing; protecting habitat for endangered species; and saving local authorities up to US\$1 million in fire-fighting operations.

### Forming partnerships for the sustainable use of the Okavango Delta

In **Botswana**, the Okavango Delta faces development pressures that could damage this vital ecosystem. A GEF-financed UNDP-managed project worked to mainstream biodiversity objectives into three important sectors—fisheries, tourism and water—to ensure more sustainable development. Now, about 60% of the Okavango Delta is benefitting from biodiversity conservation measures initiated in partnership with the public sector, private sector and civil society. Regulations and guidelines governing production activities and guiding land and nature resource management were produced, including a policy framework that regulates fish farming in sensitive areas and a wetlands conservation plan; these were outlined in the Okavango Delta Management Plan, which was endorsed at the national level by the Ministry of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism. In the tourism sector, the *Botswana Ecotourism Certification System* was developed and is among the most rigorous in the world. Since 2006, tour operators' annual investment in wetland management increased by US\$5,200,700 – a significant increase relative to the US\$360,000 invested per year before the project.

### Improving livelihoods and wildlife habitat through the sustainable use of wetlands

With support from UNDP and GEF finance, **Nepal** has demonstrated that collaborative management and sustainable use of wetlands can improve both livelihoods and habitats for wildlife. Focusing on two priority wetlands, the Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve and Ghodaghodi Lake Area, the project restored over 100 hectares of wetlands, mapped seven critical wetland sites and constructed a sluice gate at one of the sites to regulate water levels. It provided small loans to local community groups to help them adopt new trades, including livestock and fish rearing, leaf-plate making, vegetable farming and bicycle repair. As a result, the incomes of 463 wetland-dependent households have improved significantly; community members who adopted these practices have seen their incomes increase by between 25 to almost 90%. At the same time, these efforts have also positively impacted local wildlife; a recent census of wild water buffalo—the flagship indicator species of Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve—showed an increase of 18%, and the cotton pygmy goose—an indicator waterfowl of Ghodaghodi Lake Area—has increased by 19%.

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