Participatory knowledge sharing and planning workshop on "re-empowerment of indigenous people and local communities for sustainable livelihoods and conservation of nature"
28 November- 1 December 2013

In recent years, land degradation and the alterations to ecological conditions under various types of pressures, have negatively impacted the livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and Local Communities (LCs) dependent on them. Much of these problems, as a matter of fact, appear related to the lack of involvement of IPs and LCs in governing and managing natural resources and nature in general.

With the aim of re-empowering these peoples, the Center for Sustainable Development (CENESTA) and numerous grassroots organizations within affected communities have outlined a project towards re-creating the conditions for sustainable livelihoods and conservation of nature within traditional territories. For that, a useful point of departure appeared a whole scale review of relevant national laws and regulations, seeking a meaningful role for IPs and LCs in landscape management and conservation.

With the collaboration of the Forests, Rangelands and watershed Management Organization (FRWO), CENESTA thus held a participatory thinking and planning workshop with the aim of achieving a comprehensive review of Natural Resource Law. In this context, for the first time in national legislation history, IPs and LCs participated in drawing up suggestions for revisions to National Laws.

The workshop was held over four days, two of which spent revising the natural resources law and two outlining the customary tribal territories, identifying and recording the existing biodiversity values and planning participatory programs for conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

The workshop brought together a wide range of participants including approximately thirty representatives from Iranian indigenous tribes, experts from the FRWO, professors and lawyers with an understanding of the sciences and laws concerning the environment and
natural resources, the national coordinator of UNDP/GEF/SGP and facilitators and experts from CENESTA.

Topics covered in the workshop included:
- Identification and evaluation of traditional territories and ICCAs,
- Identification and assessment of biodiversity values within ICCAs,
- Outline of a biodiversity conservation and sustainable livelihoods program,
- Evaluation of traditional governance and management practices
- Reviewing and amending the Law on Natural Resources

As part of the workshop, community representatives delineated the boundaries of their traditional territories on pre-printed maps. Alongside this, the existing ecosystems and biodiversity of these territories were mapped and defined with both domestic and wild flora and fauna being noted. Specific plans for the conservation-- i.e., restoration and sustainable use-- of natural resources were then discussed and defined with an emphasis on sustainable livelihoods for communities in the region. Finally, after a brainstorming process on a set of related topics, the opinions and recommendations of the community representatives were collected for inclusion in suggestions for revisions to the law.