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First Steering Committee of the EU-funded SEMPA Project

Athens, Greece, 7 February 2024

Agenda item 3: SEMPA Project: Objectives, Annual Work Plan, Budget and progress

Progress Report

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UNEP/MAP
Athens, 2023

Introduction

1. The Project “Bolstering Mediterranean biodiversity and MCPAs for nature” (hereafter referred to as SEMPA project), is funded by European Union (EU) – the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) through the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instruments (NDICI): Regional South Neighbourhood for 2021-2023 financial instrument.
2. The project is coordinated and implemented by UNEP/MAP Secretariat and through its Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (SPA/RAC). It covers a period of 48 months starting in August 2023, with an overall budget of EUR 4,000,000 (USD 4,390,779).
3. The beneficiary countries for the specific national activities are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia; while Jordan and Palestine can also benefit from the regional/ capacity building activities of the project.

Project Summary and Objective

4. The overall objective of the SEMPA Project is to protect the biodiversity of the Mediterranean Sea and support the achievement of its Good Environmental Status. This will be achieved through the support to the implementation of the Post-2020 Strategic Action Programme for the Conservation of Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in the Mediterranean Region and continuous support to the IMAP implementation with a particular focus on biodiversity & NIS, Hydrography & coast and interlinkages with climate change, expanding the scope of the support to SEIS implementation and its related indicators to biodiversity and climate change.
5. The project proposes to enhance MPA management through coordinated implementation of the MAP Roadmap for a Comprehensive Coherent Network of Well-Managed MPAs to achieve SDG 14 and SDG 15 in the Mediterranean, while integrating targets related to SDG 5 and SDG 13 in its transversal approach.
6. Furthermore, the project focuses the sustainability of the actions and policies, ensuring that actions become progressively self-sustained, facilitating awareness raising, working to promote long-term behavioral changes in local populations toward biodiversity conservation, and finally integrating gender mainstreaming in all processes, activities and reporting. It will especially support the promotion of gender equality and gender related aspects in the designation and management processes of Marine and Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs).

Project Structure

7. The Project is structured is based on 3 major components, 5 outcomes and 9 outputs, which are hereunder described:

Component 1: Improvement and support to the development of a comprehensive and coherent Mediterranean network of well-managed and monitored MCPAs

Outcome 1: Improved on-site MCPA management and mechanisms that ensure MCPA sustainability.

- Output 1.1: Identification and designation of new MCPA and elaboration of MCPA management and business plans supported through participatory process with stakeholders.

- Output 1.2: Stakeholders trained on MCPA management and technical and financial support provided for management plan implementation

Outcome 2: Enhanced collaboration at regional scale between local, national and regional stakeholders involved in the management and communication on Marine and Coastal Protected Areas.

- Output 2.1: Forum of Marine Protected Areas in the Mediterranean organised (fourth edition)

Component 2: Promotion and support to the IMAP implementation at the regional, sub-regional and national scale

Outcome 3: IMAP biodiversity, NIS and Hydrography clusters and its interlinkages with climate change endorsed by COP for implementation to generate evidence-based assessment of policy implementation including on the relative aspects of EU green Deal.

- Output 3.1: Support provided to the development of the IMAP toward the integration of climate change, biodiversity and hydrography related indicators and indicators related to pressures and drivers, in synergy with H2020 indicators.
- Output 3.2: Integrated monitoring operational in identified pilot sites for biodiversity, NIS and hydrography common indicators and national experts trained in IMAP implementation.
- Output 3.3: National experts trained on IMAP implementation and best practices exchanged amongst IMAP implementation stakeholders at the national, sub-regional and regional level.

Component 3: Project management, coordination and gender mainstreaming

Outcome 4: Effective and timely project coordination and implementation ensured

- Output 4.1: Project management and coordination.

Country Support

8. The project aims in providing support to Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and Palestine through concrete national and regional activities aim to provide support to the countries with regards to effective MPA management and implementation of the IMAP. Table 1 presents in a summarized way the different types of support provided by the different outputs to the respective beneficiary countries.

Table 1: Different types of support provided to the respective beneficiary countries through the different outputs.

	ALG	EGY	ISR	LEB	LIB	MOR	TUN	JOR	PAL	Regional
Output 1.1										
Output 1.2										
Output 2.1										
Output 3.1										
Output 3.2										
Output 3.3										
Output 4.1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Reporting of Progress During the initial six months of Project implementation

9. The European Union Contribution Agreement was countersigned on 26th July 2023, and the project officially started on 23rd August 2023, as per contract. Since then, UNEP/MAP Barcelona Convention Secretariat has provided the enabling conditions for the effective implementation of the project, namely:

- a. Communication with the beneficiary countries for the national activities (i.e. Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine and Jordan) established since October 2023, including for the nomination of the national focal points of the project;
- b. The full-time SEMPA Project Manager is operational since 23rd August 2023;
- c. Preparation and finalisation of a Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the Regional Activity Centre for Specially Protected Areas (SPA/RAC) for the implementation of a big set of activities in the framework of the project; and
- d. Organization of coordination meetings among the Coordinating Unit, SPA/RAC and PAP/RAC:
 - i. Reviewed the legal agreements for the implementation of the IMAP at national level.
 - ii. Assessed the current situation regarding MPA establishment proposed in the ProDoc and proposed, if needed, adaptation plans to answer needs of national authorities.
- e. Preparation of the first steering committee of the project in Athens, Greece, on 7 February 2024.
- f. Recruitment of the Gender Expert
- g. Recruitment process initiated for the Finance Officer
- h. Communication on the project prepared. The webpage of the project is available in French and English.

10. Moreover, detailed activities have been identified for the implementation of all project's outcomes and outputs. These activities are described into details in the working document WG.579/3 "Annual Work Plan and Budget".

Issues, Challenges and Questions to be Addressed by the Steering Committee

11. MAP Secretariat has identified few issues and open questions which should be addressed by the Steering Committee aiming to provide support and further guidance:

- a) Participation of National institutions for the IMAP implementation: one institution should have the leadership for IMAP monitoring for each country. These institutions need to be defined by the participating countries to the Steering Committee, in line coordination with the two new projects funded by the DG ENV (EcAp MED PLUS & ML MED PLUS). The collaboration with the IMAP national committee established under the IMAP-MPA project is key to ensure proper implementation of the activities.
- b) The importance of obtaining needed approval and permits in a timely manner at national level, in order to avoid delays in the implementation of national activities.
- c) The need to ensure the use of IMAP-MPA's outputs and further suggestions towards capitalization of work already implemented in previous projects, to support SEMPA implementation and beneficiary countries' needs.
- d) To further strengthen positive efforts made during the IMAP-MPA project regarding Gender Equality and Women Empowerment, ensuring participation and involvement of all stakeholders in the project's activities.