



Indigenous Territory of a Mobile Indigenous People as Community Conserved Area— the Inverted Tulips Plain, summering grounds of the Hamuleh Tribe, Bakhtiari Indigenous Tribal Confederation, Zagross Mountains, Iran



**Results of a grassroots discussion reported by
the Council of Elders of Hamuleh Tribe and CENESTA**

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Executive Summary

This report does not describe an existing ICCA, but one that existed in the past and has been undermined by the implementation of nationalization of the rangelands which limited and weakened the ability of Indigenous mobile pastoralist communities to manage their natural resources effectively and sustainably.

A grassroots workshop was held with the elders of the Hamuleh¹ tribe of the Bakhtiari Confederation of mobile pastoralists on 6th August 2008, facilitated by the NGO CENESTA. The workshop allowed discussing whether and how that ICCA could be revived by the community.

The plain of Inverted Tulips is a well defined plain, enclosed and limited by high mountains, managed for centuries under customary laws that allowed the local biodiversity to be maintained. This would make it a great example of ICCA (Indigenous and Community-Conserved Area) if not that, in the past century, its customary management system has been subverted by a variety of factors, most importantly the disempowerment of tribal communities and the assumption of the management roles by state and private actors. This has resulted in both ecological degradation and poverty for the disempowered communities.

The grassroots workshop mentioned above identified some of the initiatives that could help returning the ecological and socio-economic balance to the area, which include:

- strengthening the understanding and capacity to adopt participatory approaches on the part of the governmental agencies concerned with the relevant rangelands;
- making sure that all their management decisions take into consideration indigenous knowledge and know-how;
- promoting government support to the Hamuleh tribe of the Bakhtiari Confederation of mobile pastoralists and ensuring that government takes on a facilitation role rather than the role of sole decision maker;
- restoring to the mobile indigenous peoples the right to manage and use their customary natural resources in a sustainable manner, thus restoring the status of the Inverted Tulip Plain as an ICCA.

Hopefully, this could still succeed in reducing the current degradation of natural resources, preserving biodiversity, promoting more sustained livelihood systems and reducing rural poverty.

¹ The Bakhtiari Confederation is one of the largest traditional groupings of Mobile Indigenous Pastoralists in Iran. There are two main branches of Bakhtiari Confederation: Haft-Lang and Chahar-Lang. The Hamuleh Tribe belongs to Chahar-Lang branch but has later affiliated to the Haft-Lang branch and has been allowed to use its territories, including the Inverted Tulip Plain.

Introduction

Iran is a large country, hosting a variety of mobile indigenous peoples customarily organised as Clans, Tribes and Confederations. These people have their own unique way of life. Tribal lifestyle is based on seasonal migration in harmony with nature, which has played a crucial role in the sustainable use of natural resources in the tribal migration territories. Resource management decisions and socio-economic choices made by tribal communities have been based on a time-tested understanding of the environment that kept uses in balance with the changing availability of resources. Indigenous knowledge and know-how on how to go about this has been developed during hundreds if not thousands of years. In the past century, however, customary management systems were undermined by a variety of factors, most importantly the disempowerment of tribal communities and the assumption of the management roles by state and private actors. This has resulted in both ecological degradation and poverty for the disempowered communities. More specifically, the causes of recent environmental degradation include:

- nationalization of natural resources and rangelands, negating the right of indigenous communities to manage their own natural resources;
- poorer management quality, as the people in charge could no longer benefit from indigenous knowledge and customary practices;
- decline of the social structures of indigenous self governance, which supported management decisions in tribal communities.

According to the tribal elders, the Hamuleh tribe of the Bakhtiari Confederation of mobile pastoralists has its summering grounds in an area of 2000ha, which is also a site where crown imperial fritillary (locally called “inverted tulips”) can be found in great abundance.. A part of this area (380ha with an altitude range of 2540-3240 m,) was recognized as a National Natural Monument in 1996. This mountainous, rolling land is located near the Karun River and the city of Farsan in Chahar Mahall and Bakhtiari Province² and is officially under jurisdiction of the Natural Resource Office of the province. The Hamuleh tribe has a grazing license and customary rights over the use of the land.

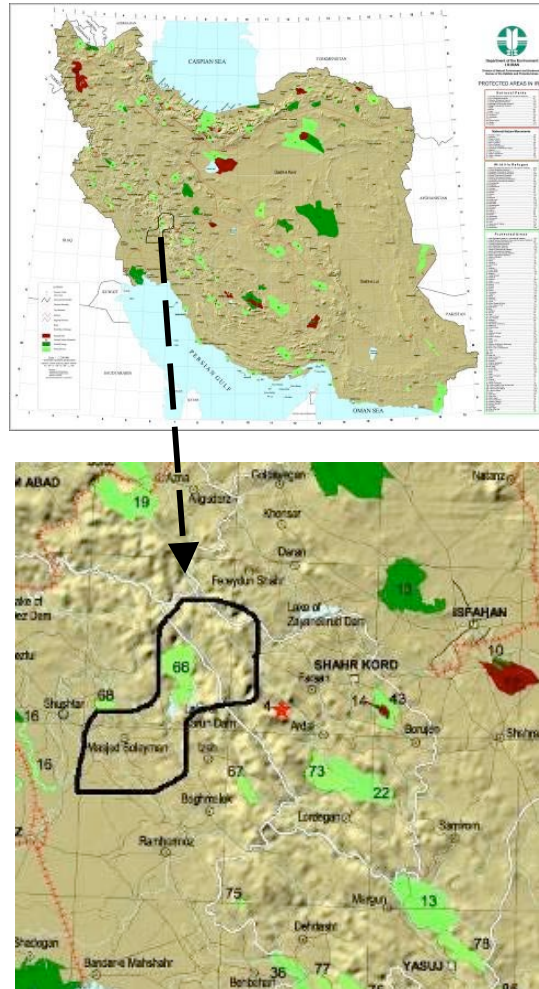
For centuries, the Hamuleh tribe has managed the area under customary laws through careful rules that allowed the local pasture to be maintained in quantity and quality and the local biodiversity to thrive. This makes it a good example of ICCA (Indigenous and Community-Conserved Area). Unfortunately, the site is also an example of modern degradation because of a variety of concurrent factors.

The nationalization of the rangelands has undermined traditional ownership rights and contributed to the degradation of the rangelands over the years. Today, however, the most important current threat to the area appears to come from overcrowding of the site by temporary visitors. An increase in the number of visitors is mainly due to the expansion of roads, an increase in the number of vehicles, and the attractions being advertised and visited by non-locals. Because of weak government management and supervision and weakened community rights, the site is being degraded at a rapid pace and it runs the risk of irreversible destruction of its unique ecological resources in the near future.

² Atlas of *Protected Areas of Iran*, Department of Environment and Tehran University, February 2001.

The participatory grassroots workshop facilitated by CENESTA as part of the project reported here discussed the present status of the Inverted Tulips Plain, and the possibility of bringing back the site under local governance and establishing an ICCA (Indigenous Community Conserved Area). This report is based on the outcomes of that workshop.

Map of Iran and Territory of Bakhtiari Confederation



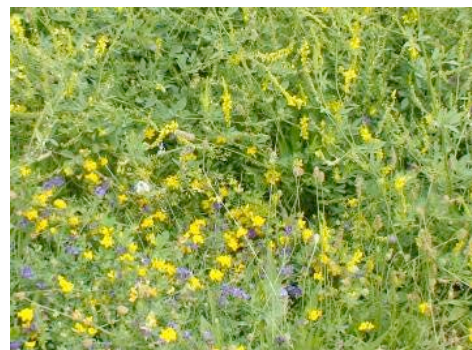
General Characteristics of the Site

The crown imperial fritillary is a perennial plant of the Liliaceae family with dazzling flowers, known as Inverted Tulips or Mary's tears (Ashkeh-Maryam) in the local Lori language. The land is located near the Karun River and the city of Farsan in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, in the south western part of the country. The site today known as "Plain of the Inverted Tulips"³ has a total area of 2000ha and is partially located in a tribal territory that customarily belongs to the Hamuleh tribe of the Bakhtiari Confederation. The site is used mainly as summering grounds for grazing, which means it is used only five months per year. The area is located in the Zayandeh-rud watershed and is drained by the river Khorbe that crosses the plain. The plain is enclosed and limited by high mountains, characteristics that have maintained the area remote and relatively isolated. Having a mean annual temperature of 10 degree C° and mean annual precipitation of 370mm, the area has dry temperate summers and very cold winters. Mountain celery, which is known as a medicinal plant, is the most important species associated with crown imperial fritillary.

Ecology

In addition to the Inverted Tulips, the Plain has an abundant diversity of other flora, very well known by the indigenous people, including celery, shallot, garlic, mushroom, wild pennyroyal, acanthus, rhubarb, marjoram, pennyroyal, mountain sesame, etc., all of which have food or medicinal values. Unfortunately, most of these plants have been in decline due to rangeland degradation and the unsustainable use of these plants by direct harvest. Two of the main species of high cultural and economic significance to the local tribal communities are the Inverted Tulips and the shallots.

For quite some time the indigenous nomadic pastoralists have tried to protect those species but the interfering of both government and private sector into tribal territory has prevented their protection and the local people are worried about the degradation of their land and ecological diversity.



³ Land Registration No. 843

Inverted Tulips

Inverted Tulips cover 2000ha of the tribal territory which is a part of Hamuleh tribe summering ground. The locals believe that these flowers have been blooming in this plain since the Sassanid period. The Plain of Inverted Tulips is nationally known as a tourist attraction site. The flowers bloom in spring (April) and cover the whole plain in a red carpet. This beautiful landscape in the past few years has attracted many tourists. However due to mismanagement, the conservation of the flowering plant is endangered by the number of people who visit the site and extract/damage the resources.



As mentioned, the Plain of Inverted Tulips is a tourist attraction site, extensively visited during spring (April). The number of visitors has been so high that the government has rented out the site to the private sector to allow for better management and income generation. The private sector, however, has only invested in establishing a kiosk with a guard at the entrance to the site, to collect entrance fees. No management initiatives have been taken to actually protect the site.



Once the tourists have paid the entrance fees there is no control on their behaviour and they freely pick as many flowers as they want, sometimes taking them out with their roots (to replant them in flowerboxes!). The ecological cost of this is that the plain is being degraded and the density of the flowers is decreasing according to the tribal elders.

This occurs while the tribal communities with customary rights over the territory have the knowledge and social structure necessary to manage the site in a more sustainable way.

According to local estimates, during the one-month peak season (April) the plain has an average of 1000 visitors per day. The entrance fees are 10,000 Rls per person, summing up to a rough seasonal income from entrance fees of approximately 300,000,000 Rls (about USD31.000). None of this income goes towards the indigenous pastoral communities who are the true custodians of the land. If equitably distributed among the households of the tribe with customary rights, the income could bring an additional 600,000Rls per year to each household—a very important additional source of income!



Shallot

Another plant species which is found in this area is shallot. Its economic value has increased in recent years, which contributed to its over-harvest. According to local estimates, during the spring and summer season, people collect about 20 tons of this species in this area. Each kilogram is sold for 10000Rls, which generates an income of about 200,000,000 Rls per year. Equally divided among the households of the indigenous pastoral communities with customary rights on the land, this adds about 400,000Rls per year to the income of each household. For this plant, however, there is a black-market that contributes mainly to the income of the middlemen instead of the local communities who have customary rights over the land and its resources. If the management of this species could be officially assigned to the local communities not only the benefit would be theirs (as opposed to the middlemen who buy the products from them at a very low price and sell them for high prices) but also the local communities would protect the species from further decline.



Fauna

In the past many animals lived in the plain including wild goat and leopard, which were the indicator animal species of the region. Today not many are left. At present a good population of partridge exists in the area, but it is seriously threatened by hunters who come to hunt when the tribal communities are on migration to their wintering grounds.

Status of Rangelands

Although the quality of the rangelands has declined after their nationalization that undermined the customary management systems, the hard topographical and climatic conditions have prevented so far the development of extensive agriculture, preserving much of the rangelands as such. The area also has a difficult access by road and remains remote, preventing its use by people. Yet, there is a threat from over-grazing mainly by some tribal communities who have permanently settled in the area. As a result, the ecological quality of the rangelands has diminished and, although the vegetation cover is still good, the quantity and quality of livestock feed has reduced. Some of the pasture species found now on the plain are introduced and invasive... but the tribal communities need to use them for feeding their livestock.



There are still many medicinal plants and many other plants that can be used as food that could be revived if a decent management of the area could be undertaken.



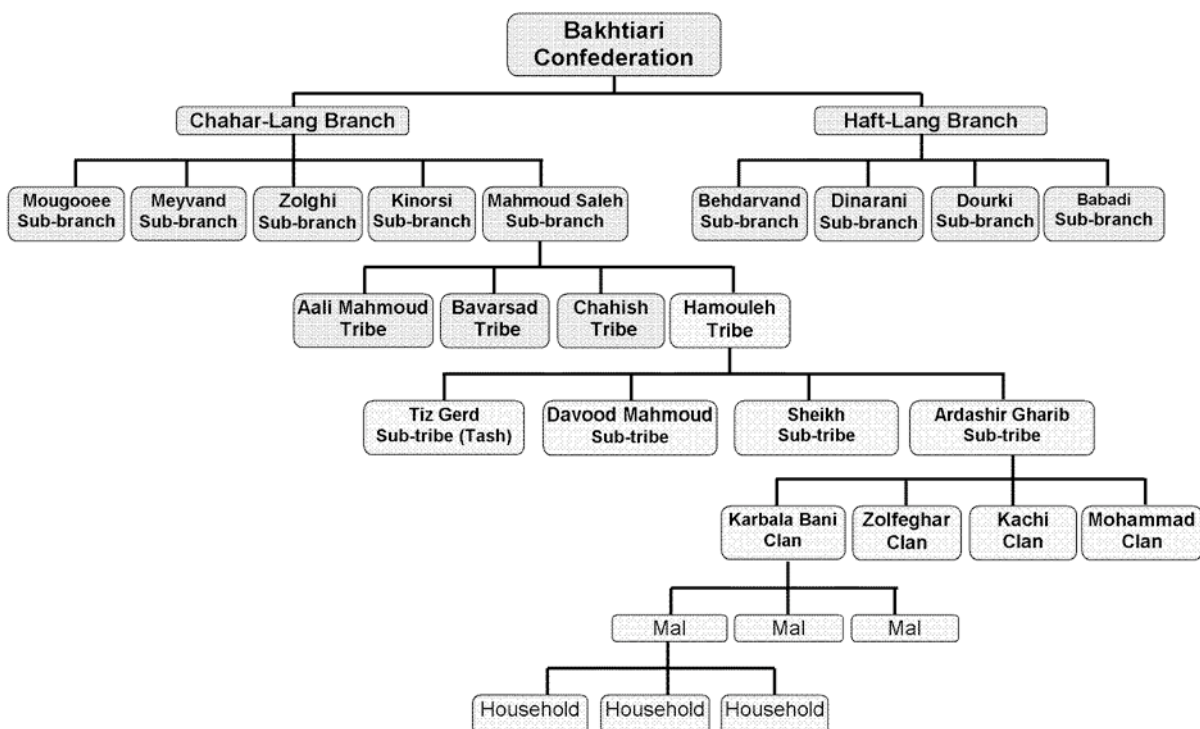
Origin of the CCA

Customarily this area is the summering territory of the Hamuleh tribe. According to the existing documents it has been so at least for the past century. There is no conflict over land between the tribal communities in this area, which is a strong positive point in terms of the management of its resources. The Hamuleh tribe uses this area from 20th of April to 20th of September each year. The wintering grounds are in the Khuzestan Province (near Masjed Soleiman) in the south western tip of Iran. The migratory route is about 480 km and it takes about 20 days to migrate between summering and wintering grounds. It is one of the most difficult migratory routes in Iran.

Social structure

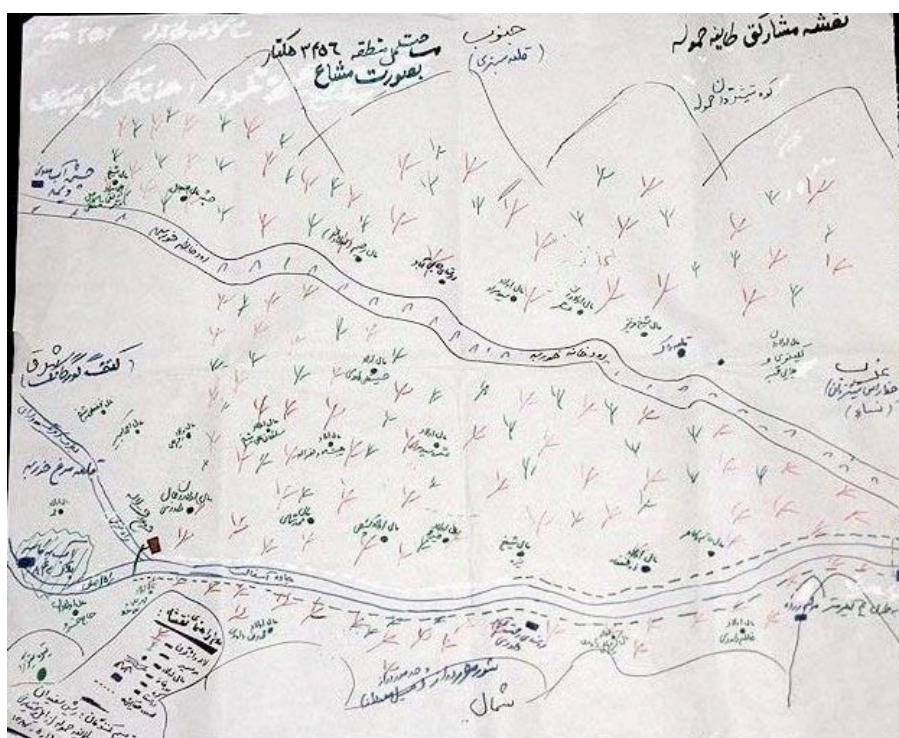
The communities who inhabit the plain and use it as their territory belong to the Hamuleh tribe, which is one of the independent tribes of the Bakhtiari Confederation, belonging to the Haft Lang Branch. This Tribe has four sub-tribes (Tash) with the name of Ardashir Gharib, Sheikh, Davood Mahmood and Gerd.

Social Structure of Bakhtiari Confederation

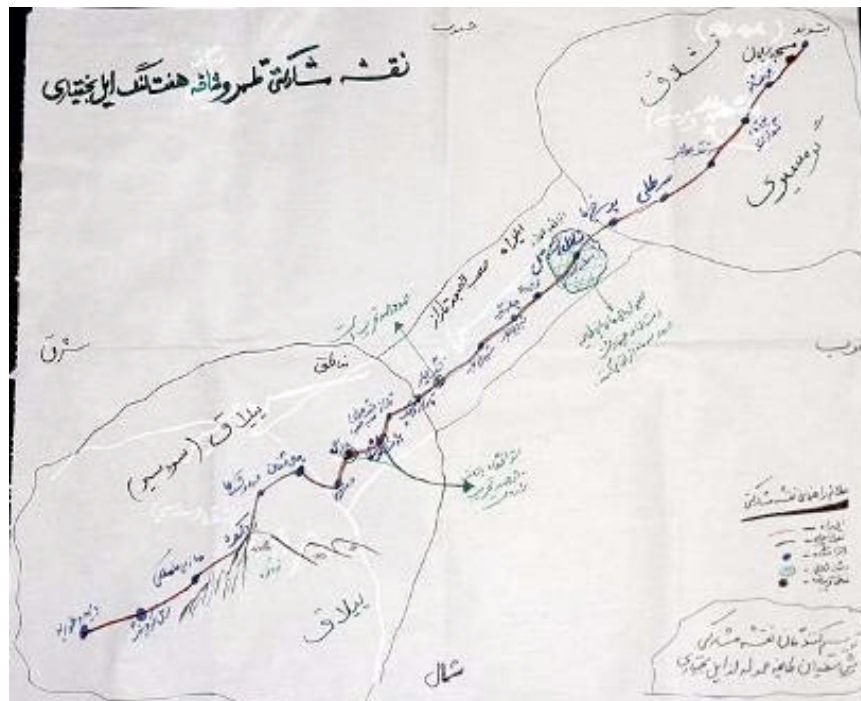


The Hamuleh tribe consists of 500 households. The average number of livestock in each household is about 100 small and 20 large animals. So there are about 5000 small and 2000 large animals using the territorial rangelands of this tribe. Some of the households have settled in small villages in the territory. At present there are four small villages (which have been mainly formed because of political pressures on migratory tribes to settle down) with a total number of 100 households in the area. Due to difficult climatic conditions, the inhabitants of these villages tend to leave the area. In fact residential households of the mentioned villages are part of the migratory Hamuleh Tribe and there is no conflict of interest between them.

Participatory Map of Inverted Tulips Plain



Participatory Map of Migratory route of Haft Lang Branch of Bakhtiari Confederation



Economy and livelihood system

Livestock breeding is the main source of livelihood for both migratory and settled tribal households. Rain-fed agriculture is also found there, but only to a very limited extent. Selling of medicinal plants and other plants that may be used as food also brings some minimal income to the community. In general, the population income is lower than national average and the communities can be classified as relatively poor.

Value, effectiveness, sustainability

The following factors reflect the socio-cultural characteristics and values of the Hamuleh Tribe which reflect the potential for establishment of an ICCA in this area:

- Strong socio-cultural values and a functioning tribal community;
- Presence of strong leadership by the elders united in the “Council of Elders for the Sustainable Livelihood Fund of Hamuleh Tribe”;
- The elders are supportive of the direct management idea and the community respects them;
- Agreement among community elders about the customary management of natural resources;
- Geographical setting of the area (enclosed, manageable size);
- No conflicts over land between tribal communities and rural/urban communities;

- Existing biodiversity values (medicinal plants, etc.);
- Presence of Inverted Tulips as a major tourism attraction and potential for generating income for the local communities;
- Existence of other aspects of tribal life which could also be attractive for tourism.

The direct management of the Plain of Inverted Tulips by the indigenous pastoral communities with customary rights can have the following benefits:

- prevention of the destruction of the site and better protection of the Inverted Tulips through local knowledge and management;
- sustainable use of rangelands as the livelihoods of local people depend on them;
- protection of other plant and animal species including medicinal plants and plants with high economic value;
- additional income and improved livelihoods for local communities, reducing pressure on natural resources;
- improved balance in ecological, economic and social environments.

During the grassroots workshop with the Council of the Elders of the Hamuleh Tribe, a discussion carried out with respect to their threats and needs and the possibility of receiving from the government management authority and responsibility for the Inverted Tulips plain. Its results are reported below.

Threats and needs

Threats

- Alienation and marginalization of local communities and weakening of customary practices;
- Degradation of rangelands and natural resources of the area (reduced biodiversity);
- Unsustainable livelihoods and poverty due to increased pressure on natural resources and their degradation;
- Rapid degeneration of natural resources due to increased poverty;
- Lack of interagency collaboration;
- Lack of collaboration between government officials and the local community;
- Lack of in depth understanding of collaborative management and participatory approaches by governmental agencies;
- Conflict of interests within the local community and presence of opportunistic individuals who prefer individual benefits rather than the collective good;
- Conflict of interests with outsiders over the natural resources currently exploited.
- Distrust of local communities in outsiders due to past failures.

Needs

- Alleviating poverty in the community;
- Improving livelihoods and increasing a flow of benefits to the local communities;
- Empowering local communities and encouraging them to participate in all aspects of sustainable development;
- Promoting various livelihood options (such as traditional livestock breeding and agriculture...) that encourage the local communities to sustain the environment.
- Assigning responsibility to local communities to use local knowledge and customary practices to prevent rangeland degradation and collaborate in its management.

Formal recognition

Before the nationalization of the rangelands and land reform,⁴ the rangeland of the Plain of Inverted Tulips belonged to the tribal communities and was used as tribal commons. Decisions over usage of the rangelands were made by elders who were respected by the community. There were customary rules and regulations on how to use the rangelands and decisions were made based on the natural capacity of the rangelands.

In the old times when customary laws and local management regimes were still in place, the rangelands and their natural resources were more ecologically sound and had higher biodiversity. Through local knowledge, local people helped maintaining this ecological balance through time. They had the necessary knowledge and wisdom to assess rangeland capacity and the maximum number of livestock that could be supported, and they determined indicator species and climatic conditions before starting to migrate between wintering and summering territories. As a matter of fact, most of the rangelands of Iran were in good standing before the Nationalization Law. A sense of ownership over rangeland, its wise management and sustaining livelihoods were the three main principles that were respected in the past and contributed significantly to the protection of the ecological values of rangelands. After nationalisation, however, most natural resources came under government jurisdiction and top-down decision-making was implemented without using participatory approaches. As a result, the traditional management systems that supported rangelands were seriously undermined, and so were the rangelands.

With increasing population and rapid urbanization pressure, rangelands and other natural resources of the country are in even more serious danger. If no action is taken, the tribal communities themselves will be forced to misuse the rangelands and think about short term benefits rather than long-term good of the community. They are trying, however, to take action towards the long-term benefits of protecting the rangelands while earning additional income from tourism. As their livelihood and socio-cultural values depend on the resources of the Inverted Tulips Plain they can be responsible for making sure they are used wisely. With strong community support and strong leadership there is great potential for these communities to be successful as managers of the Plain of Inverted Tulips and its

⁴ Land Reform and Nationalisation of Natural Resources were formed within the framework of the 1960 “White Revolution” of the Shah.

rangelands. They can become a great example of community-based management of natural resources in Iran.

To successfully implement this approach they believe that the following should happen:

- replacing the top-down approach in decision making over the natural resources of this area with a bottom-up approach, with the government playing a facilitation role;
- supporting of the indigenous pastoral communities against outside pressures (especially from the opportunists who misuse and deplete the local resources);
- delegating management responsibility to local communities by giving back to the Council of Elders of Hamuleh Tribe and its Sustainable Livelihoods Fund the right to manage the rangelands under their customary laws and practices;
- changing the existing laws and regulations— as necessary— to support the local communities in all of the above.



Networking

The recent establishment of a Sustainable Livelihood Fund has helped in strengthening the existing social structure of the tribal community. Within the local community there is now a representative institution that is performing well its internal role. The most important problem now is the weak collaboration with the relevant government agencies. It is expected that the creation of an ICCA will enhance and improve this relationship.

Raising awareness at national, provincial and local levels is critical according to the local communities. Strengthening the existing social institutions and building upon them will also help in protecting the natural resources, biodiversity, and promoting sustainable use. In fact government agencies also agree that local community collaboration is necessary to improve the management of rangelands and will enhance rangeland quality. As a result they have agreed to allocate part of the responsibility for rangeland management to local communities within a temporal and spatial framework. Active and capable local community groups are crucial for this declaration to be followed up by facts.

Conclusions

- Considering the poverty of the indigenous pastoral communities with customary rights over the area, there is a need to provide them with additional livelihood support;
- At present they are extremely dependent on rangelands and their resources, but the rapid degradation of the rangelands (due to declining customary knowledge and practices) is jeopardising their life support system;
- There is a high potential for tourism in the area as well as high plant biodiversity (medicinal plants, etc.), which could provide additional income to the indigenous pastoral community;
- For the above to remain a viable option it is critical to protect the resources and use them in a more sustainable manner;
- Only the indigenous pastoral community can achieve this as they have the local knowledge as well as the socio-economic capacity and the right incentives to do so;
- By returning the customary rights and practices to the area and making sure that the indigenous pastoral community has an economic incentive to benefit from the natural resources of the area, it is likely that the natural resources can still be managed in a sustainable way;
- By protecting these resources, the indigenous pastoral community will have a chance to contribute to both its own sustainable livelihoods and the natural and cultural heritage of the country..
- This initiative will help the government by cutting out unnecessary investments to encourage the private sector to promote ecotourism;
- This initiative, however, will only be possible if the government will support it by facilitating the process of change through participatory approaches, giving the chance to the local communities to contribute to their own sustainable development.