



# Wetlands: Source of sustainable livelihoods

Wetlands are essential for human health and prosperity. They provide us with fresh water, ensure our food supply, sustain biodiversity, protect against flooding, and store carbon dioxide. As a major source of employment globally, they are also ideally placed to showcase truly sustainable livelihoods.

## More than a billion livelihoods

Wetlands already sustain a vast range of jobs globally:

- Almost a billion households in Asia, Africa and the Americas depend on rice growing and processing for their main livelihoods.
- More than 660 million people rely on fishing and aquaculture for a living; most commercial fish breed or spawn in coastal wetlands, and 40% of all fish consumed are raised in aquaculture.
- An estimated half of international tourists seek relaxation in wetland areas, especially coastal zones. The travel and tourism sectors support 266 million jobs, and account for 8.9% of the world's employment.
- Rivers and inland waterways play a vital role in transporting goods and people in many parts of the world. In the Amazon basin, 12 million passengers and 50 million tons of freight are moved each year by 41 different shipping companies.
- Vast networks deliver fresh water and treat wastewater around the world, while employing significant workforces. For example, Bangkok's Metropolitan Waterworks Authority employs over 5,300 staff.
- The bottled water industry delivered over 70 billion gallons of water worldwide in 2013. Danone sells major brands such as Evian and Volvic, Bonafont and Mizone, and employs more than 37,000 people in its water businesses worldwide.

- Harvesting and processing plants, fruits, reeds and grasses also provide significant employment directly in or near wetlands, especially in developing countries.

## Situation: a vicious circle

Despite all the jobs and other vital benefits that wetlands provide, 64% of the world's wetlands have disappeared since 1900. The wetlands that still remain are often so degraded that the people who directly rely on wetlands for their living – often the very poor – are driven into even deeper poverty. In addition, by 2025, it is estimated that 35% of people will directly face declining water supplies. This is the result of a point of view that mistakenly sees wetlands as wasteland.

## Solution: a virtuous cycle

Enabling people to make a decent living while ensuring that wetlands will always provide drinkable water, biodiversity, food and their many other benefits, do not have to be conflicting goals. In fact, the new UN Sustainable Development Goals underline that reducing poverty requires us to protect and restore ecosystems such as wetlands.



# Sustainability unites three key aspects of development to achieve that goal

- economic development: ensuring that people have the ways and means to build their own income and wealth
- social development: improving cooperation, respect and trust between social groups, and promoting gender equality
- environmental protection: conserving and restoring the earth's ecosystems to benefit both human life and the natural environment

## How to create sustainable livelihoods: What are the key ingredients?

- 1 **Use a people-centred approach to understand needs**
  - assess how vulnerable people are to shocks, natural disasters and civil strife, and how to reduce that vulnerability
  - understand how important seasonal prices and employment opportunities are, and explore other options
  - take an inventory of the potential resources available
- 2 **Make multiple kinds of 'capital' available**
  - actual products harvested from wetlands such as reeds, fish, rice etc.
  - skills and knowledge to understand trade-offs and prioritizing
- 3 **Identify who can provide the different kinds of 'capital' and make the changes happen**
  - good health to be able to earn a living
  - a voice in planning how local wetlands should be used
  - basic infrastructure, equipment and tools
  - credit, cash or micro-loans
  - integrate key actors such as governments, institutions, NGOs and local communities
  - determine who will take what role in making the changes

### Case study: Brazil

#### Tamar Project on sea turtles

Tamar is an organization that protects five endangered species of sea turtles in Brazil. With funding from key sponsor Petrobras, it has become a model for conservation programmes worldwide. This project:

- started in 1980 by hiring local fishermen to patrol the sea turtle nesting beaches in their regular fishing areas during the nesting season; halting the take of turtles and eggs
- built up a network of 23 centres located in important areas for sea turtle feeding, nesting, and development.
- directly involves more than 1,300 people, some 85% of them local coastal residents. This includes 400 fishermen, who work in various field activities.
- employs people from 25 different fishing villages who staff visitor centres, work in shops or as guides, run conservation education activities, and manufacture Tamar clothing for sale.



### Case study: Senegal

#### Mangrove restoration to ensure sustainable livelihoods

Senegal still has some 185,000 hectares of mangrove estuaries in the Casamance and Sine Saloum regions, but 45,000 hectares have been lost since the 1970s. Healthy mangroves serve as effective salt water filtration systems, provide protection against storms, and act as nursery grounds for fish.

The world's largest mangrove reforestation project is under way here, thanks to Danone and the Livelihoods Carbon Fund, who are working with the Senegalese NGO Océanium. This project:

- has replanted 79 million mangrove trees on more than 10,000 hectares
- promotes the restoration of rice paddies
- will produce up to 18,000 extra tons of fish annually, along with shrimps, oysters, and molluscs
- plants trees that will store 500,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> over 20 years
- has mobilized the efforts of 350 local villages and 200,000 people



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### The Ramsar Convention



The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, commonly known as the Ramsar Convention, is a global inter-governmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. It is the only global treaty to focus on one single ecosystem.