

The World Heritage Nomination of The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities

A Case Study of Providing Upstream Guidance and Capacity Building
for a World Heritage Nomination to a State Party to the 1972 Convention

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Ur and Ziggurat © Géraldine Chatelard

ACRONYMS

ARC-WH	Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CRIM	Centre for Restoration of the Iraqi Marshlands
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
ICCROM	International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
IMELS	Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
IUCN-ROWA	IUCN Regional Office for West Asia (formerly WESCANA)
IUCN-WESCANA	IUCN West/Central Asia and North Africa
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
MoC	Ministry of Culture
MoEnv	Ministry of Environment
MoTA	Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
MoWR	Ministry of Water Resources
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OUV	Outstanding Universal Value
SBAH	State Board of Antiquities and Heritage
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP-DTIE-IETC	UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics - International Environmental Technology Centre
UNEP-ROWA	UNEP Regional Office for West Asia
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
WHC	UNESCO World Heritage Centre
WHCBS	World Heritage Capacity Building Strategy



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2014, Iraq as a State Party to the 1972 World Heritage Convention nominated The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities, a mixed serial property, for inscription on the World Heritage List. This was the first attempt by an Arab State at nominating a property both mixed and serial, and the first time Iraq had nominated a natural property. As importantly, the nomination presents a rare example where national preparation teams benefited from an intensive training and capacity-building programme, and where a high level of collaboration and coordination between natural and cultural heritage specialists was attained. It also gave IUCN, as an Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee, the opportunity to provide extensive upstream advisory guidance to a State Party to the 1972 Convention for the preparation of a nomination, in accordance with Decision 33 COM 14.A2 para. 14 of 2009 by the World Heritage Committee. Last but not least, the nomination preparation was conceived primarily as a tool to raise awareness among Iraqi decision makers and heritage professionals of the considerable efforts required to protect and conserve the historical, cultural, biological and hydrological values of the nominated property.

Challenges

In its early stages, the preparation of the nomination dossier faced several challenges relating mainly to the following issues:

- The poor status of Iraq's natural and cultural heritage in a country affected by recurrent conflicts and an unstable political situation;
- An institutional set-up characterized by unclear authority over cultural and natural heritage and no established national governance system for World Heritage;
- A general lack of awareness among decision makers and the public about the World Heritage Convention and other conventions supporting natural and cultural heritage protection;

- The limited technical capacity of the members of the national teams appointed to prepare the nomination dossier;
- The paucity of up-to-date studies on the proposed property;
- Erratic funding entailing several adjustments to the preparation schedule and approaches;
- Lack of security in the country which affected several aspects of the nomination preparation.

Process Followed

The following steps led to the successful completion of the nomination dossier:

- The establishment of a strategic partnership between national institutions and international organizations on the basis of a shared vision for the conservation of a heritage site with a potential OUV;
- Through this partnership, the mobilization of international funding for the nomination preparation;
- Efforts to raise the awareness of the country's political decision makers about the World Heritage Convention to ensure their support and buy-in for the nomination;
- The setting-up of a national umbrella (Steering Committee) for the nomination preparation;
- As part of IUCN's role in the upstream process, the preparation of a feasibility study on the natural values of the proposed property;
- On the basis of the study results, the development by several international and regional organizations within the World Heritage system of a training and capacity-building programme covering all aspects of the World Heritage Convention, nomination process, dossier preparation and management planning, together with the preparation of background studies on the cultural components of the proposed property;
- The establishment by the State Party of national natural and cultural heritage preparation teams charged with the preparation of the nomination dossier and accountable to the Steering Committee;
- A comprehensive revision and expansion of the description of the proposed property on the Tentative List of Iraq which was used as a blueprint for the nomination dossier;
- The adoption of a training and mentoring methodology including the use of Arabic as the main language, the involvement of regional and international experts, a two-track preparation schedule for the natural and cultural components, together with joint working sessions;
- The endorsement of the final nomination dossier by concerned national authorities.

Achievements

Besides the finalization and successful submission of the nomination dossier, the nomination process resulted in several important outcomes which contributed to reinforcing the capacity of Iraq to implement the World Heritage Convention, namely:

- The creation of a national coordination and communication mechanism represented by the inter-ministerial National Steering Committee overseeing the preparation of the nomination dossier and the development of a management system to conserve the natural and cultural values of the proposed property;
- The designation and establishment of Iraq's first national park in one of the components of the nominated property alongside the development of a management

framework for all the components of the property on the basis of World Heritage requirements;

- The establishment of a strategic partnership between the Steering Committee and the main national environmental NGO active in the Ahwār, or Marshlands, region;
- The allocation of national and provincial funds for the conservation and management of the cultural components of the property;
- The creation of a National Committee for World Heritage for both nature and culture, among the first of its kind in the Arab region, with a mandate to unify and coordinate national efforts related to the World Heritage programme, address issues in existing World Heritage properties in the country and those the State Party intends to nominate for inscription;
- A 14-member national team fully aware of the requirements and mechanisms of the World Heritage programme and system, and able to update Iraq's Tentative List, prepare nomination dossiers, and advise on conservation and management issues for properties already inscribed on the World Heritage List or which Iraq plans to nominate;
- An enhanced awareness about the World Heritage Convention among Iraqi decision makers, natural and cultural heritage professionals in government and civil society, and a large section of the Iraqi public, thanks to the publicity given to the nomination since the inception of the process;
- The demonstration that international conventions are of relevance to meet national goals in matters of heritage conservation, and the inclusion of the World Heritage Convention and other conventions (Ramsar, CBD, *etc.*) in sectoral strategies including plans to revise relevant legislation;
- Finally, a clearer and more constructive role of the Advisory Bodies, World Heritage Centre (WHC) and the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH), a UNESCO Category 2 Centre, to enhance the national World Heritage programme of Iraq with the provision of first-hand advice and guidance based on global trends and best practices aligned with national specificity and priorities.

LESSONS LEARNED

The preparation of the nomination of The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities could form part of the best practice guidelines for the upstream process for which a systematization of the role of the Advisory Bodies and other World Heritage actors, such as the WHC, is still in its early development stage. Lessons learned in the context of the experience described in this report can be summarized as follows:

1. The pedagogical methodology for providing upstream advisory support and guidance to States Parties engaged in nominating a property for World Heritage inscription is still experimental, and based on a learning-by-doing approach that will necessarily be adapted to each context. On the basis of the experience described in this report, the following advice can be offered for similar undertakings:

- The upstream guidance is best supported by such strategic tools as the Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention, World Heritage thematic studies prepared by the Advisory Bodies, dossier preparation manuals, and other official World Heritage documents;
- There is clearly added value in involving in the process a regional Category 2 centre dedicated to World Heritage. As part of its mandate and under the WHCBS, such a partner can help identify and mobilize supporting regional experts, offer the necessary logistical and financial assistance for meetings and workshops, and provide a learning environment adjusted to local linguistic and cultural specificities.
- In the case of a mixed nomination, it would be appropriate that both IUCN and ICOMOS engage with the upstream process in a coordinated manner to ensure an equivalent level of technical and capacity development input for the natural and cultural components of a nomination.

2. The scope of involvement of different organizations of the World Heritage system in the upstream process varies according to internal policies. At times, however, their involvement carries the potential for a conflict of roles and interests. This is particularly the case for the Advisory Bodies and the WHC. This is why:

- The upstream process should be conceived and presented as a mere technical tool – amongst other technical, institutional and policy tools – supporting States Parties in implementing the World Heritage Convention.
- Each organization should clearly define the scope of their involvement in the process, prepare guidelines for experts involved, and make this scope known to the State Party and other partners early on.
- The roles of experts evaluating nomination dossiers on behalf of the Advisory Bodies and that of advisers and trainers in the framework of the upstream process need to be clearly separated and allocated to different people. One way of ensuring the necessary level of transparency is to include in the nomination dossier the names of all experts involved at one stage or another in providing advice and guidance.

3. The positive relations established between the organizations involved in the upstream process and the State Party may deteriorate if a nomination is evaluated negatively by the Advisory Bodies and/or if the decision by the World Heritage Committee is not to inscribe the proposed property or even to defer or refer the nomination. This is why:

- Organizations involved in the upstream process should ensure that they carefully manage a State Party's expectations. In particular, they should refrain from any commitment or indication that their involvement will increase the chances of a nominated property being inscribed on the World Heritage List. Rather, they should keep alerting the State Party of the scope of the task ahead, the stringency of World Heritage requirements, and the independence of the evaluation process.
- They should clearly state that their advice is not prescriptive. Whatever decision a State Party makes based on the advice, the State Party remains fully responsible for developing the content of a nomination dossier and for the final product.
- Involved organizations should keep reminding the State Party that the ultimate focus of a nomination is to enhance the conservation of a property, and that neither referral nor deferral of a nomination should be taken as rebukes but as opportunities to improve the dossier and the property's conservation.



Landscape of the Iraqi Marshlands © ARC-WH

INTRODUCTION

In January 2014, Iraq as a State Party to the 1972 World Heritage Convention since 5 March 1974 nominated The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities, a mixed serial property, for inscription on the World Heritage List. Irrespective of the results of the property's evaluation by the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee, and of the decision the latter will take with regards to the property's inscription on the World Heritage List, the nomination process was, in many respects, ground-breaking. To start with, this was the first attempt by an Arab State at nominating a property both mixed and serial,¹ and the first time Iraq had nominated a natural property. As importantly, the nomination presented a rare example where national preparation teams benefited from an intensive training and capacity-building programme – in this case devised jointly by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) – and where a high level of collaboration and coordination between natural and cultural heritage specialists was attained. It also gave IUCN, as an Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee, the opportunity to provide extensive upstream advisory guidance to a State Party to the 1972 World Heritage Convention for the preparation of a nomination, in accordance with Decision 33 COM 14.A2 para. 14 of 2009 by the World Heritage Committee. Last but not least, the nomination preparation – which received financial assistance from the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea (IMELS) – was conceived primarily as a tool to raise awareness among Iraqi decision-makers and heritage professionals of the considerable efforts required to protect and conserve the historical, cultural, biological and hydrological values of the nominated property.

The nomination resulted in several important outcomes which contributed to reinforcing the capacity of Iraq, a country transitioning from one governance regime to another and affected by political and security instability, to implement the World Heritage Convention, namely:

- The creation of a national coordination and communication mechanism represented by the inter-ministerial Steering Committee overseeing the preparation of the nomination dossier and the development of a management system to conserve the natural and cultural values of the proposed property;
- The designation and establishment of Iraq's first national park in the Central Marshes (one of the components of the nominated property) alongside the development of a management framework plan for all the natural components of the property on the basis of World Heritage requirements;
- The establishment of a strategic partnership between the Steering Committee and the main national environmental non-governmental organization (NGO) active in the Ahwar, or Marshlands, region;
- The allocation of national and provincial funds for the conservation and management of the cultural components of the property, namely the Mesopotamian cities of Ur, Uruk and Eridu, and a series of smaller archaeological sites inside the Marshlands;
- The creation of an inter-ministerial National Committee for World Heritage for both nature and culture, among the first of its kind in the Arab region, with a mandate to unify and coordinate national efforts related to the World Heritage programme, address issues in existing World Heritage properties in the country and those the State Party intends to nominate for inscription;
- A 14-member national team – including specialists in animal biology, botany, hydrology, geology, archaeology, history and geographic information systems (GIS)

¹ At the time, two mixed properties in the Arab States region were inscribed on the World Heritage List (the Tassili n'Ajjer in Algeria and Wadi Rum Protected Area in Jordan), however, neither of them were serial.

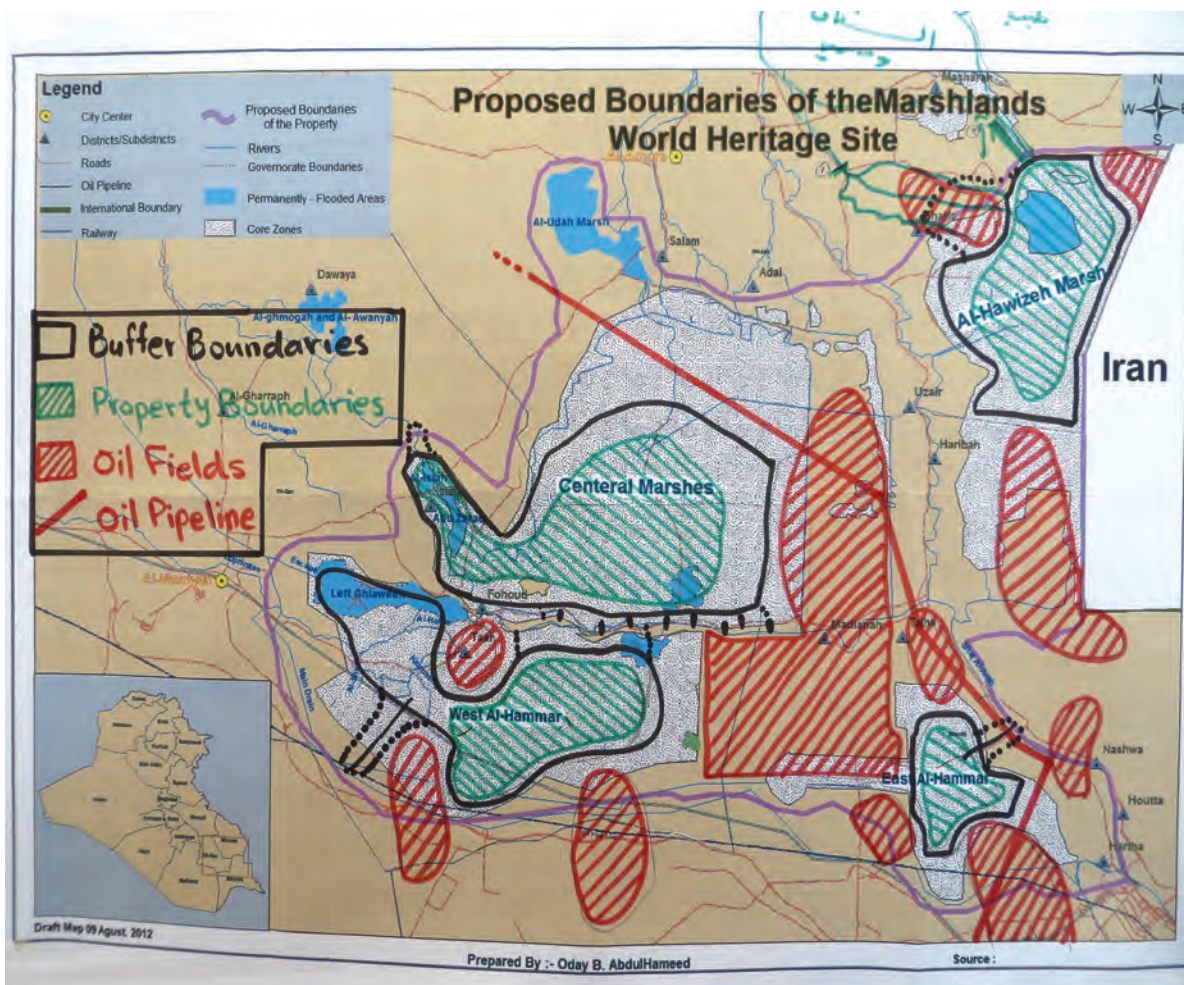
- fully aware of the requirements and mechanisms of the World Heritage programme and system, and able to update Iraq's Tentative List, prepare nomination dossiers, and advise on conservation and management issues for properties already inscribed on the World Heritage List or which Iraq plans to nominate;
- An enhanced awareness about the World Heritage Convention among Iraqi decision-makers, natural and cultural heritage professionals in government and civil society, and a large section of the Iraqi public thanks to the publicity given to the nomination since the inception of the process;
- Finally, a clearer and more constructive role of the Advisory Bodies, World Heritage Centre (WHC) and the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH), a UNESCO Category 2 Centre, to enhance the national World Heritage programme of Iraq with the provision of first-hand advice and guidance based on global trends and best practices aligned with national specificities and priorities.

In fulfilment of its mission to strengthen the implementation of the World Heritage Convention in the Arab States Region, the ARC-WH facilitated, supported and hosted in its premises in Manama, Bahrain, several of the hands-on training workshops leading to the development of the nomination dossier. The ARC-WH prepared the present report documenting the nomination process to serve as a record of experience and lessons learned on the methodology for national capacity development in the preparation of mixed nominations, particularly in the Arab region where mixed properties remain largely under-represented. Such documentation is foreseen to benefit Iraq and the Arab Region (at the least) in the preparation of new nominations and the drawing from the lessons learned from this extensive knowledge-based experience.

This report particularly documents:

- The national vision behind the adoption of an extensive training and capacity development scheme based on the World Heritage Programme;
- The stages of the nomination from its early inception in 2003 when the property was first included in Iraq's Tentative List until its successful completion in January 2014;
- The background, rationale and mechanisms for the UNEP-UNESCO collaboration in support of the nomination preparation;
- The mechanisms and nature of the upstream advisory role provided by the Advisory Bodies and the WHC;
- The set-up put in place to prepare the nomination dossier under national leadership;
- The level and nature of involvement of external experts;
- The development and implementation of a capacity-building methodology;
- The challenges faced collectively and by the different parties involved;
- The lessons learned throughout the process.

This report is not a promotional document for the nominated property. Rather it is premised on the recognition that the educational dynamic of the nomination has an intrinsic value, meeting the objectives of the World Heritage Capacity Building Strategy (WHCBS) adopted in 2011. The report also purports to illustrate with a case study the still experimental provision of advice and feedback to States Parties by Advisory Bodies and other actors of the World Heritage system during the upstream process to nominations. Such guidance started being systematized as a follow-up to Decision 33 COM 14.A2 adopted by the World Heritage Committee in 2009 and urging for creative approaches to improve the implementation of the Convention.



Sketch of the boundaries of the property, training workshop, ARC-WH, June 2013 © MoEnv

1. SETTING THE STAGE

This section describes the general status of Iraq's natural and cultural heritage, and recent institutional efforts to improve its conservation. Furthermore, background information is provided about restoration and management efforts for the Marshlands region which paved the way for the World Heritage nomination and upstream advisory role of several organizations. Details are given of the genesis and initial phases of the joint UNEP-UNESCO project "Natural and cultural management of the Iraqi Marshlands as World Heritage". Thanks to funding from the Government of Italy, this project ensured that financial, administrative and technical support was available to develop a fully fledged training and capacity development programme benefiting the State Party. Finally, this section explores the rationale behind the decision by the State Party to undertake the preparation of a World Heritage nomination dossier for The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities, and how it coincided with a reconsideration of the role of relevant organizations, foremost among them the Advisory Bodies and the

WHC, in the upstream process to the nomination.

1.1 The status of Iraq's heritage

1.1.1 Natural heritage

Iraq is a country of the Middle East that comprises a variety of ecosystems and landscapes, ranging from the Zagros mountains covered with forest and steppe in the north of the country, to the Tigris-Euphrates alluvial marshes. These two eco-regions are separated by vast swaths of desert and arid steppes dotted with lakes and marshes, and crossed from north to south by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers that join to form the Shatt al-Arab estuary some 80km before reaching the Arabian Gulf. Iraq also has a rich biological diversity of regional and global significance for its ecosystems, flora and fauna, with a wide spectrum of natural habitats spreading across its vast eco-regions. These habitats include unique ensembles of mountainous, desert, plains, freshwater and marine ecosystems, all representative of this part of the world. Nonetheless, the importance of such natural constituents was long ignored by government policies and development agendas under the previous political regime.

It can be said that war and mismanagement have had devastating effects on Iraq's bio- and geo-diversity, including its water levels and quality. Military operations have degraded landscapes and ecosystems, particularly in border areas with Iran and Kuwait. Long-lasting consequences include the destruction of vegetation cover and the release of heavy metals and other hazardous substances into the air, soil and ground water. Long-term neglect and lack of public awareness and policies on pollution have affected Iraq's watersheds, a situation compounded by upstream water diversion projects. Another example is seen in the mountainous Kurdistan Region in the north; it once boasted some of the densest woods of the country, rich with bears, mountain goats, wolves and leopards. Here again, decades of war, neglect by public authorities and drought have destroyed habitats and wildlife. Still today, throughout the country, illegal hunting, forest fires, wood cutting, mining, quarrying and development encroachment are poorly regulated.

The government-led drainage of the southern Marshlands (or Ahwar) started as early as the 1950s in the context of agricultural development projects. An intense draining campaign driven by political aims was performed in the early 1990s and was devastating for the ecological, hydrological, socio-economic and cultural integrity of the area. It caused the unprecedented loss of several species of native birds, animals and plants. It also thoroughly altered the natural water cycle with severe consequences for human life, the physical environment and ecosystems. Subjected to one of the biggest man-made disasters in the recent natural history of the region, the Ahwar nonetheless revealed their remarkable capacity for self-restoration after the 2003 change of political regime. This provided the rationale for justifying the World Heritage calibre of the area under the natural theme.

The institutional and legal framework ensuring the protection of the country's natural heritage remains weak however, with overlap among ministries: a Ministry of Environment (MoEnv) was created for the first time in 2004; however, it shares part of its conservation mandate with the Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), and other ministries and local governments. Environmental awareness is still very low, and the country's natural heritage is undervalued and understudied. Furthermore the country does not benefit enough from a protected area network including guidelines, strategy, policy, planning, funding, and trained staff. Finally, the rehabilitation and conservation of the country's natural heritage has not figured prominently in the recent public discourse in Iraq, which to a large extent has been preoccupied with security and reconstruction.

Recent efforts should however not be underestimated. The evolution of a natural heritage programme has coincided with the development of a new governance system. Since its establishment, the MoEnv has had to address innumerable needs and international obligations related to natural heritage protection and sustainability. These have included developing legislation and a set of by-laws and regulations to organize and control activities, building the national capacities for the implementation of the law and its enforcement, coordinating institutional efforts related to the sector, raising public awareness and securing popular support for nature protection and ecological safeguarding, developing and implementing sound scientific research and monitoring in cooperation with academia and civil society, enhancing the participation and involvement of local communities in the conservation of heritage along with addressing people's social and economic needs, and finally securing budgetary allocations from the government, international donors and the private sector to finance an environment management programme. After a decade of work, the MoEnv was able to initiate several important national programmes "*inter alia*" country biodiversity assessments, a protected areas programme, targeted research protocols, in addition to a World Heritage programme.

The recently restored southern Marshlands have been the focus of a number of initiatives starting in 2004 when the newly established MoEnv began research. These efforts, conducted with support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), UNEP and IMELS, and with logistical and staff support from the Iraqi NGO Nature Iraq, have led to a national programme to survey the country's biological diversity: the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) Project. Iraq's accession to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2009 was an important first step to raise the capabilities of Iraqis in the field of biodiversity conservation. In addition, Iraq signed the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and designated the Hawizeh (or Huwaizah) Marsh as its first Ramsar site in 2008 under the jurisdiction of the MoWR. A management plan was drafted for this area as a part of the New Eden Group initiatives funded by IMELS. At the time of writing, Iraq had just joined or was in the process of joining several other international environmental conventions.²

However, existing biodiversity projects and the implementation of international conventions face considerable obstacles mainly related to applied scientific research, site management capacities, stakeholder outreach and involvement, jurisdictional disputes, incomplete

² These include the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species; the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species; the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol; and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

legislation, difficulties in raising awareness, funding availability, and security constraints. Training for the staff of concerned public bodies, and institutional capacity development are also two crucial needs in a sector which is all but new to Iraq, a country isolated from the global environmental movement for three decades. This is precisely what a number of international organizations, such as UNEP and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have been committed to do with the support of bilateral and international donors.

1.1.2 Cultural heritage

The country's archaeological and built heritage ranges from the remains of prehistoric cultures to the architecture of the 20th century, with highlights dating from the Mesopotamian, Hellenistic and Islamic eras. Besides several world famous sites – such as Nineveh, Babylon, Ur, Ashur, Hatra and Samarra – the country is dotted with some 12,000 less known archaeological remains, historic buildings and urban ensembles, and includes vast collections of artefacts found on these sites and conserved in museums. Some sites, like the Ahwar, qualify as cultural landscapes shaped by the common interaction of human communities and nature.

Like Iraq's natural heritage, the country's cultural heritage has also long suffered from recurrent wars and poor governance. How the country's cultural heritage was hit by the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq and its aftermath has been widely publicized by the media. Damages have ranged from the looting of the Iraq National Museum and several other cultural institutions across the country, to the plundering of hundreds of archaeological sites left unguarded after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, to the installation of military bases inside or near major historical sites, such as Babylon or Ur, and to the defacing of monuments by warring parties. This destruction was compounded by the previous 20 years of domestic neglect. During the 1980s, the Iraqi regime diverted resources from all sectors towards financing its war with Iran. The following decade was marked by the 1991 Gulf War, uprisings in the South and North of the country, and the imposition of international sanctions. Especially in the South, regional museums and archaeological sites were looted, and networks of antiquity traffickers developed. Unsuitable interventions on sites and monuments complete the picture. Major monuments in Babylon were rebuilt with no concern for their authenticity. Other sites have been flooded by dam projects, or paid the price of industrial, agricultural and urban development.

Despite the existence of an institutional and legal framework for cultural heritage predating the 2003 change of regime, several factors, including the restructuring of the country's governance system, have slowed down the process of heritage rehabilitation and conservation. The State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), as the authority assuming oversight of the country's cultural heritage, used to be under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture (MoC), the institution that submitted the Marshlands of Mesopotamia for placement on Iraq's Tentative List in 2003. In 2006, a Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) was created by decree; however, the Parliament waited until 2012 before it adopted a law instituting the ministry. Between these two dates, the line of authority over SBAH remained unclear.

Although Iraq is party to most international cultural and heritage conventions³, concerned institutions are struggling to implement them. Generally speaking, the country's public cultural and heritage institutions suffer from the unstable security situation, which prevents proper access to heritage sites for their study, protection, conservation and monitoring. Due to the brain drain Iraq has experienced since the 1980s, a cadre of conservation staff is lacking and those remaining are overburdened. Mid-level and junior employees have graduated from archaeology departments in Iraqi universities where state-of-the-art conservation and management methods are not part of the curriculum.

Several steps have been taken to remedy what is, in many respects, a catastrophic human resource situation. Iraqi authorities have reached out to international institutions for support with the training of a new cadre of specialists in heritage conservation methodologies and technologies. Several Iraqi archaeologists are currently completing higher studies abroad. With assistance from the US and Italian Governments, a National Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage has been set up to train Iraq's museum and heritage professionals in preservation and conservation. All foreign archaeological missions active in the country make a point of including in their projects training components for Iraqi colleagues. Finally UNESCO, and other international heritage organizations such as the World Monument Fund, conceive of all their activities in support of Iraqi heritage as capacity building for local professionals and government institutions.

1.1.3 World Heritage

Although Iraq became party to the World Heritage Convention as early as 1974, at the time of writing no natural property is yet inscribed on the list or even placed on the country's Tentative List. This is perhaps unsurprising considering that the concept of heritage is still widely understood as pertaining exclusively to cultural properties. In this regard, it is telling that, in 2012, after the World Heritage Centre (WHC) approached the Iraqi National Commission for UNESCO with a request for the identification of a national focal point for natural heritage, only archaeologists were nominated.

When it comes to cultural properties, the situation is better but far from optimal. Iraq's Tentative List, first drawn up in 2000, includes to date 11 cultural sites such as the Wadi Al-Salam Cemetery in Najaf, the fortress of Al-Ukhaidar, and the Sacred Complex of Babylon. Only the ones submitted recently are described in some detail, with efforts made to identify attributes carrying a potential OUV, together with possible criteria for nominations and sites for the comparative analysis. As is the case with many other States Parties, Iraq's Tentative List would benefit from being updated to include natural sites, to develop the descriptions of cultural sites already on the list, add new ones, but also remove those which do not appear to have potential OUVs or meet the conditions of authenticity and/or integrity.

Despite its rich and ancient cultural heritage, Iraq can only boast four properties on the World Heritage List: Hatra (inscribed in 1985), the capital of the first Arab kingdom; Ashur (inscribed in 2003 directly on the List of World Heritage in Danger), the first capital of the Assyrian empire; Samarra Archaeological City (inscribed in 2007 and placed immediately

³ Besides the World Heritage Convention, Iraq has ratified the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property; the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; and the Convention on the Promotion and Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

after on the Danger List), the second capital of the Abbasid caliphate; and Erbil Citadel (inscribed in 2014). The nomination of Ashur was examined under the emergency procedure on account of a dam project threatening to flood the ruins. For its part, Samarra was put on the Danger List because of the conflict prevailing at the time which, among others, did not allow the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), an Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee, to undertake a field mission to assess the nominated property.

In 2011, at a time when the threats that had caused the two properties to be placed on the Danger List had been removed, ICOMOS undertook a reactive monitoring mission to assess the conditions of the sites, and provided a number of recommendations for remedial actions forming a prerequisite for a request by the State Party to remove the properties from the Danger List. These actions focused on establishing dedicated site management units and developing comprehensive conservation plans. The State Party has however been slow in implementing these recommendations.

The unstable political and security situation clearly limits the capacity of the State Party to implement the World Heritage Convention. At the time of writing, the province of Ninawa, in which the site of Hatra is situated, had fallen out of government control, whereas the regions of Ashur and Samarra were the theatres of renewed armed conflict. Besides such major obstacles over which heritage professionals have little control, they also have weak technical capacity to remedy possible damage to World Heritage properties, and yet limited awareness of state-of-the-art approaches to the conservation of the other properties the State Party is intending to nominate in the future. Other issues are institutional capacity, existing legal frameworks, and challenges to raise the profile of heritage conservation within public agendas so as to secure necessary budget allocations.

The WHC has trained several members of SBAH in the preparation of nomination dossiers, and has provided advice on periodic reporting on World Heritage sites. Whenever the security situation has allowed for more direct involvement, and particularly in the case of the Erbil Citadel, UNESCO has provided technical assistance for the conservation and management of properties on the Tentative List. The World Monument Fund has also assisted the SBAH with the development and implementation of a comprehensive management plan for the site of Babylon. However, these cases remain the exception.

Supporting the professional development of the Iraqi heritage community, helping institutions strengthen their planning, management and conservation capacities, raising awareness about the World Heritage Convention among decision-makers and the public at large, and mainstreaming the concept of natural heritage are all tasks that require a long-term concerted effort by Iraqi national institutions and the various actors of the World Heritage system. The capacity-building programme developed to support the efforts of the State Party in preparing the nomination of The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities was conceived as a milestone along this road.

1.2 National impetus for international involvement in the Marshlands

Following the priorities set by the Government of Iraq for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the country post-2003, United Nations agencies have paid some attention to the sectors of environment and cultural heritage. The Marshlands, in particular, have been the focus of several initiatives in favour of their environmental restoration and management.

As early as 2004, UNEP Division of Technology, Industry and Economics-International Environmental Technology Centre (UNEP-DTIE-IETC) initiated the project "Support for the environmental management of the Iraqi Marshlands" with funding from the multidonor UN Iraq Trust Fund together with the Governments of Japan and the government of Italy. Implemented in partnership with the MoEnv, the project addressed the issue of Marshlands water quality, and management needs to protect human health, livelihoods and the ecosystem. The project covered the southern provinces of Dhi Qar, Maysan and Basra over which the Marshlands extend. Besides improving access to drinking water and sanitation, activities included awareness raising for local communities and decision-makers, capacity building for staff of national and provincial institutions, and the conduct of a number of important studies on water quality, solid waste management, socio-economics, *etc.* The project was completed in 2009; however, UNEP, through its Regional Office for West Asia (UNEP-ROWA), remained active alongside Iraq's environmental agencies to provide capacity building on the implementation of the CBD and the Ramsar Convention.

In parallel, between 2004 and 2006, the UNESCO Office for Iraq, through its Science Sector, and in partnership with the MoWR, ran another project funded by the UN Iraq Trust Fund. "Capacity building of water institutions in Iraq" worked towards ensuring water security in Iraq through integrated water resources management and the establishment of a regional framework on equitable water sharing in the Tigris-Euphrates basin. Over that period, the MoWR – responsible for regulating the country's water resources including the inflow to the Marshlands areas – established the Centre for Restoration of the Iraqi Marshlands (CRIM) to address the restoration and conservation of the region mainly from the hydrological and hydraulic perspectives.

Another prominent actor engaged in Marshlands restoration has been the Government of Italy through the IMELS which, in 2003, launched the "New Eden" project in partnership with the MoEnv, MoWR and the newly established national NGO Nature Iraq. In October 2004, the project partners identified three main areas of intervention: water, ecology, and socio-economics, the latter including cultural heritage. Considering the Marshlands from the standpoint of its natural and cultural heritage echoed the approach initiated by the MoC which had placed the Marshlands of Mesopotamia in Iraq's Tentative List the previous year as a mixed site. Although poorly articulated as regards the natural heritage attributes and value of the property, this was the very first step an Iraqi public institution had taken to broaden the concept of heritage beyond its cultural dimension. This step also expressed for the very first time the intention of the State Party to nominate the Marshlands for inclusion on the World Heritage List, and can be viewed as the inception of the upstream process to the property's nomination for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

A further step towards envisioning the Marshlands as a primary heritage site of global importance was taken in 2008 when the MoEnv requested the WHC to introduce Iraqi environment professionals from concerned ministries to the World Heritage Convention. A first workshop on natural World Heritage and biodiversity was organized in June of the same year bringing together over 30 Iraqi participants, Jordanian biodiversity experts with whom to exchange regional experiences, staff from IUCN's regional office (including the protected area and World Heritage units), and from the science and culture sectors at the UNESCO Office for Iraq. The workshop focused on biodiversity conservation and management, and on how Iraq could harness international conventions, specifically the CBD and the World Heritage Convention, to achieve these aims. The meeting was instrumental in prompting Iraq to join the CBD the following year. It also provided the MoEnv with an opportunity to call for international support to improve the conservation status of the Marshlands up to World Heritage standards.

The UNEP project was the first one aiming to restore the Marshlands. It represented a very important step in terms of international mobilization, and was our first experience as Iraqis dealing with an international organization in matters of environmental conservation. The project also delivered tangible results in the form of six water treatment plants. On this basis, we developed a very good level of confidence and collaboration with UNDP. This is why, when we started thinking of the Marshlands in terms of World Heritage, we thought that we could use the experience and knowledge developed in the context of the UNEP project.

Ali Al-Lami, Adviser, MoEnv, and Head of the National Steering Committee for the World Heritage Nomination and Management of the Marshlands

Responding to this call, UNEP and UNESCO jointly developed a three-year project under the name “Natural and cultural management of the Iraqi Marshlands as World Heritage”. The IMELS agreed to fund the project thereby reaffirming its continued interest in the restoration of the Marshlands. UNEP was to be the recipient of funds, and implement the project through a series of agreements with the UNESCO Office for Iraq for the cultural components, and IUCN-WESCAN⁴ for the natural components. To buttress project implementation, the MoEnv mobilized its own funds which made a number of activities possible inside Iraq.

UNEP decided to engage with the World Heritage Convention – that does not traditionally fall within its remit – as a guiding tool to establish a comprehensive management framework for the Marshlands. Within an approach that considers complementarity with the CBD, the World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines were used to set as the project’s objectives the protection of the attributes and values of the region not only from an environmental perspective, but including also the region’s historical, cultural and social dimensions. Such attributes and values, some of them already identified or assumed when the project was drafted, needed further refinement. A case also needed to be built for the outstanding universal value (OUV) of the property whereas conservation threats had to be assessed and addressed in the management framework. In other words, UNEP saw the development of a management framework meeting World Heritage requirements as an exercise engaging a broad range of Iraqi stakeholders to meet the goal of sustainable restoration and development for the Marshlands. On the basis of its previous involvement in the Marshlands alongside the Iraqi MoEnv and MoWR, UNEP-DTIE-IETC was charged with implementing the new project.

UNESCO was the most logical UN partner for cultural heritage. The Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (better known as the World Heritage Convention) was adopted by the General Assembly of UNESCO in 1972. Part of the organization’s mandate, through its WHC, and network of regional and field offices, and Category 2 centres, is to assist States Parties in meeting their obligations under the Convention, *inter alia*, by providing capacity building and upstream advice in the preparation of site nominations and management plans or arrangements suitable to conserve a property’s OUV(s). The Culture Sector at the UNESCO Office for Iraq had the

⁴ As of 2011, IUCN West/Central Asia and North Africa (WESCAN) was renamed IUCN-ROWA (Regional Office for West Asia).

knowledge of the institutional stakeholders charged with the implementation of the World Heritage Convention in Iraq in the area of cultural heritage, and of the challenges they were facing in terms of human resources and capacity development needs. The UNESCO Iraq Office was therefore UNEP-DTIE-IETC's direct partner to implement the project with a view to providing capacity building and advisory support for the cultural component of the management framework.

As for IUCN, named in the World Heritage Convention as an Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee, its main mandate is to provide expert evaluations of natural heritage properties submitted for inscription on the World Heritage List and reporting on the state of conservation of listed properties. IUCN's role has evolved in recent years to include advisory and capacity development for States Parties through, *inter alia*, training on management of protected areas, expert advice on including natural sites in Tentative Lists, the preparation of nomination dossiers, *etc.* The TABE'A Programme coordinates IUCN's work on the World Heritage Convention in the Arab States region in close collaboration with the IUCN Global World Heritage Programme. Both the World Heritage and Protected Area Units at IUCN were involved in the project.

The project was therefore conceived on the basis of a combination of mutually reinforcing objectives with the impetus given by the Iraqi MoEnv eager to harness the World Heritage Convention to leverage domestic and international political, institutional and financial support for the protection of a flagship natural and cultural heritage site. In the process, UNEP, UNESCO and IUCN were to provide capacity development for the preparation of a management framework, and champion World Heritage conservation standards among a variety of Iraqi stakeholders. Related to a prestigious site-based convention comprising the world's most important properties for nature and culture, the World Heritage nomination process was a very strong awareness-raising and strategic advocacy tool utilized by the MoEnv to enhance decision-makers' interest and support for the wider goals and targets of the ministry in regard to the protection and sustainability of Iraq's natural heritage.

1.3 From management framework to nomination

1.3.1 Mobilizing institutional support

The project "Natural and cultural management of the Iraqi Marshlands as World Heritage" was launched in June 2009 in Amman, Jordan, with a high-level meeting attended by senior officials from the Ministries of Environment, Culture, and Planning and Development Cooperation, and from the SBAH. Representatives from the provinces of Basra, Dhi Qar and Maysan also attended. The Iraqi delegation was headed by the Minister of State for Marshland Affairs, a body mandated to coordinate management initiatives in the region.⁵ The bilateral side was represented by CIDA and the governments of Japan and Italy. Finally, intergovernmental organizations present included UNEP, UNESCO, UNDP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The rationale behind the choice of participants was threefold:

⁵ The ministry was created in 2007 and abolished in 2011 after it proved unable to carry out its mandate, in part because it was not sufficiently empowered legally and financially, and in part because there was no definition of, nor consensus on, the boundaries of the Marshlands, and hence on the extent of the ministry's jurisdiction.

- To consult Iraqi stakeholders and international partners on the proposed activities so as to coordinate with other past, on-going, or planned initiatives in the Marshlands;
- To garner political support for the project from concerned government authorities, both at the national and provincial levels;
- To identify potential for additional resource mobilization should the project require it.

Invited agencies and organizations each presented their initiatives for the rehabilitation and conservation of the Marshlands. They were in turn given an introduction to the World Heritage Convention including its main concepts and the requirements for inscription on the World Heritage List (OUV, criteria, authenticity, integrity and comparative analysis), particularly in terms of management. Representatives of Advisory Bodies and UNESCO delivered the introduction.

Important components of what was going to be the methodology applied throughout the project were initiated at the meeting: the involvement of several organizations from the World Heritage system to provide early advisory support; the reliance, as much as possible, on regional experts who could deliver the message in Arabic; the use of information and training material prepared by the WHC and the Advisory Bodies (Convention, Operational Guidelines, PowerPoint presentations, guidelines on protected area management), in Arabic whenever available.

The main recommendation coming out of the meeting was to establish a national steering committee for the World Heritage management of the Marshlands (hereinafter Steering Committee), a step which the Government of Iraq took in early 2010. Appointed members comprised upper-level technical staff from the MoEnv, the Ramsar Secretariat for Iraq (MoWR), the Ministry of State for Marshland Affairs, the SBAH, the Ministry of Planning, and the heads of Marshlands Committees within the provincial administrations of Maysan, Basra and Dhi Qar. The Steering Committee was mandated to facilitate inter-ministerial and stakeholder coordination for the project planning and implementation. It was chaired by the Ministry of Environment.

1.3.2 Screening the property for a natural OUV

In spring 2010, IUCN-ROWA contracted an international biodiversity conservation expert knowledgeable about the World Heritage Convention, Tobias Garstecki, to lead a preliminary study on the conservation of the biological diversity and ecosystem of the Marshlands with a view to supporting the development of a management plan. He was assisted by Zuhair Amr, a regional animal biologist, who was charged with the review of the literature in Arabic and English, and the identification of gaps. Upon reviewing the first draft of the report, IUCN World Heritage Programme remarked that management planning for World Heritage properties should be geared in priority towards protecting the property's potential OUV. Therefore the request came back to the lead consultant to include in his study an evaluation of the Marshlands' potential under the four World Heritage natural criteria. It was expected that this study could additionally be useful to States Parties as a methodology to assess values against criteria.



Fishermen of the marshes © Mudhafar Salim

The report was released originally in English.⁶ It noted that, until the 1970s/80s, the Ahwar represented a prime example of an inland delta developed in extreme drought conditions through conveyed fresh water of riverine origin, and that it possessed a global significance for freshwater and terrestrial biodiversity. Nonetheless, the study argued that, after decades of neglect and mismanagement, the Ahwar were likely to have suffered some serious – and possibly irreversible – impacts on their key natural constituents which would weaken their case for World Heritage status. However, based on recent research conducted by various national and international partners, the study recorded clear indications of the remarkable self-restoration capacity of the Ahwar which immediately started after the local population took spontaneous reflooding actions following the fall of the previous regime. On the basis of a rather large body of existing research conducted before and after the Iraqi Marshlands were drained, and upon the consultation of relevant IUCN thematic studies, the screening report concluded that the property possessed a potential OUV under criteria (x) and possibly (ix)⁷ but that its integrity might be seriously challenged, including by the oil industry, agricultural development, lack of environmental and conservation-driven policies, weak legislation and institutional capacities for the sustainable management of natural resources, *etc.* A management planning approach was proposed and geared towards protecting and conserving the property's potential OUV. Several knowledge gaps were also identified, and recommendations put forth to undertake further field-based research so as to bolster the justification of OUV.

⁶ Garstecki, T. and Amr, Z 2011. "Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management in the Iraqi Marshlands – Screening Study on Potential World Heritage Nomination." Amman: IUCN-ROWA. An Arabic translation of the report was eventually made available by the ARC-WH.

⁷ See the list and description of the criteria considered for the proposed nomination in Box 4.

One primary implication of the report was based on the following argument. First, Iraq had to be able to demonstrate with an evidence-based approach that, over the past decade, the natural values of the Ahwar had been restored to a state comparable to their documented historic global prominence in the 1970s. Then, Iraq had to provide assurance that such rehabilitation would be sustained in the long term through clear governance, sound planning, effective monitoring, long-term value-based management, and proper stakeholder participation, collaboration and coordination. Only if these conditions were met could a strong case be made for the World Heritage nomination of the Marshlands.

The importance of the screening study for the nomination process cannot be overstated. It represented a corner stone in building an argument for a potential World Heritage nomination of the Ahwar on account of their natural OUV. It also represented the main document with a comprehensive listing of scientific and management references for the proposed property, and was therefore instrumental in helping the natural heritage preparation team authenticate their judgments, data and conclusions.

In parallel, UNESCO Iraq explored the possibility of commissioning a desk review of available sources on the cultural values of the Marshlands. It was soon realized that the studies conducted before and after the partial reflooding of the Marshlands had focused almost exclusively on the region's environmental aspects, and that cultural and social data were largely out-of-date or not comprehensive. In 2007, UNEP had released a report yielding useful socio-economic data on the Marshlands population; however, the study did not cover any cultural aspects.⁸ Another study, conducted by the MoEnv in the Howeizah, also failed to consider the cultural dimension.⁹ Smaller-scale studies conducted by local or international NGOs active in the Marshlands were piecemeal. It was unclear what remained of the region's cultural landscape – otherwise well documented between the 1950s and 1970s – after extensive ecological engineering, destruction of villages, and forced population displacement performed by the previous regime. On the other hand, one significant piece of information coming from the provincial Departments of Antiquities was that the receding marshes had uncovered several dozen archaeological sites previously unknown and that had just started to be surveyed. Their study was likely to call for a reconsideration of the Marshlands' historical and cultural importance in line with novel approaches in Mesopotamian archaeology emphasizing the study of landscapes and the environment. It seemed therefore premature to commission international expertise to assess the potential cultural OUV of the Ahwar before field surveys were completed.

UNESCO Iraq initially aimed at partnering with the SBAH and research institutions in the south of Iraq to map the tangible and intangible cultural elements of the region. The SBAH however lacked the leadership empowered to make such a decision in the context where two ministries were vying for authority over the organization. In this context, UNESCO commissioned two background documents for the dossier preparation: a bibliographical survey of the cultural heritage of the Marshlands,¹⁰ and a basic survey of archaeological

⁸ UNEP. 2007. "Survey on Demographic, Social and Economic Conditions of Marshlands in the South of Iraq." Project on Support for Environmental Management of the Iraqi Marshlands. UNEP and Thi Qar University.

⁹ MoEnv. 2009. "Suffering Howeizah Population" (In Arabic). Baghdad: Ministry of Environment, Marshlands Department.

¹⁰ Touili, R. and Al-Hamdani, A. 2011. "Survey of Bibliography: Cultural Heritage of the Iraqi Marshlands". Amman: UNESCO Iraq Office.



Surveying the cultural sites in the Marshlands, 2011
© SBAH

sites covering the region between Rumayla to the west and West Qurna to the east,¹¹ both delivered in late 2011. However, no study envisioning the Ahwar as a living cultural landscape, nor an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage, were carried out as part of the dossier preparation.

1.3.3 Learning from another natural World Heritage property

UNEP and UNESCO shared the view that exposing the members of the Steering Committee to the situation of another, comparable natural property would help sensitize them to World Heritage management requirements, and would

convince them to work together to develop a management framework. To this effect, in June 2010, UNEP and UNESCO organized a study tour to the Danube Delta in Romania, inscribed in 1991 on the World Heritage List as a natural property under criteria (viii) and (x). The Danube Delta was identified by UNEP and IUCN among a limited number of wetlands on the World Heritage List as a possible model to emulate for the management of the Marshlands. The property was selected for its similarities with the Ahwar as regards: bioclimatic conditions, significance for wetlands biodiversity, the typology of the wetlands it comprised, the local and national socio-economic contexts related to the site's development, the political transformations which influenced decisions related to its management and conservation, in addition to several other logistical and operational factors. More specifically, the selection argument included the fact that the Danube formed the best preserved delta and the largest continuous marshland in Europe. It comprises numerous freshwater lakes interconnected by channels and includes the largest area of reed marshlands in the world. It constitutes critical habitats for migratory birds and other animals, and supports currently endangered flora and fauna. It is a major wetland on the flyway between central and Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa. It faces major threats such as changes in conditions upstream in the Danube as well as changes in the delta itself. This includes the upstream changes to the water flow and distribution which occurred during the former communist era, such as the development of flood protection dams and groynes which cut the river off from the floodplain, significantly diminishing the amount of available sediments. Other threats faced by the Danube are the waterway navigation and harbour developments in the region, unsustainable tourism, worsening of water quality during the last 50 years, and agriculture, fish farming and forestry. In spite of this, the overall basic hydrological and ecological system of the delta is still intact and was believed to serve as a good learning model for a newly proposed property such as the Iraqi Marshlands on the World Heritage List.

¹¹ Al-Hamdani, A. 2011. "Archaeological survey of the Marshlands of southern Iraq". Amman: UNESCO Iraq Office.



Basra Reed Warbler, endangered species
© Mudhafar Salim



Soft-shelled turtle, a threatened species
© Mudhafar Salim

1.3.4 Shifting towards nomination

Shortly after the Danube Delta study tour, the Steering Committee was convened in Istanbul. This meeting was a milestone inaugurating a new approach to the project with a shift from the preparation of a management framework to that of a nomination dossier. The ground for the decision adopted by the Steering Committee in Istanbul was laid thanks to the preliminary conclusions of the screening study on the natural values of the Ahwar, and exchanges during the previous months between members of the Steering Committee, staff of IUCN-ROWA and UNESCO Iraq, and Iraqi and international experts with knowledge of the Marshlands' natural and cultural history. All parties involved had come to the shared realization that, to run any chance of ever being finalized and implemented, a management plan needed the endorsement of a broad range of decision makers, institutional stakeholders, and Marshlands inhabitants. So far, none of the four previous or on-going management initiatives for the Marshlands undertaken since 2003 had had practical results on the ground.¹² Developed by national organizations with international technical and financial input, these initiatives produced extremely valuable data and documentation together with baseline studies. However, they remained technocratic and lacked the type of symbolic reward susceptible to garner high-level political support for their implementation. They also failed to appeal to most concerned national and local stakeholders who had diverging, if not conflicting, interests.

¹² These initiatives are analysed in Garstecki and Amr, 2011: 91-104.

To avoid repeating the same mistakes, and on the basis of indications about the existence and type of a potential OUV under which the Marshlands might be nominated as a World Heritage site, the Steering Committee decided that the objective should no longer be the preparation of a management framework meeting World Heritage requirements. Rather, the output was to be a nomination dossier clearly identifying the OUV together with a management framework geared towards the conservation of this OUV. This dossier, accompanied by recommendations, was to be submitted to high-level decision makers in Iraq. In parallel, high-profile publicity was to be given to the dossier preparation process through the Iraqi press and other channels so as to inform policy makers as well as local stakeholders. In this process, raising national expectations for an international recognition was envisioned as a strategy for building a broad consensus, well beyond technical circles, for the conservation of the Marshlands.

The shift in approach was reflected in the project's name which was changed to "World Heritage nomination process as a tool to enhance the natural and cultural management of the Iraqi Marshlands". The Iraqi body overseeing the project was renamed the National Steering Committee for the World Heritage Nomination and Management of the Marshlands. Its role was redefined as overseeing the process of nomination and management framework preparation, whereas a core preparation team consisting of Iraqi environmental and cultural experts was to be appointed to take care of the dossier preparation.

This courageous move required a strong vision-driven agenda with a commendable donor's flexibility and adaptive response. It was the main underlying factor re-boosting the national interest to safeguard the Ahwar. It can be safely argued that introducing the preparation of the nomination dossier as part of the project goals created enough motivation for the various stakeholders to engage positively and unify in a national project with the anticipation of seeing the Ahwar inscribed on the World Heritage List as the first Iraqi mixed site. What used to be the source and cause of institutional conflict and competition was turned into a motivation for collaboration and complementarity. The ultimate goal remained the same, namely to contribute to the successful rehabilitation and long-term sustainability of the Ahwar as a prime national and global site for culture and nature. The change was merely in redesigning the road map leading to achievement of the foreseen goal.

1.4 Upstream guidance for the nomination

Iraq's decision to shift to preparing a nomination dossier, adopted in summer 2010, coincided with a global reassessment of the role of the Advisory Bodies and the WHC in relation to States Parties prior to the consideration of a nomination by the World Heritage Committee. This new thinking provided IUCN and UNESCO with legitimacy to continue their engagement with the Government of Iraq on the preparation of the Marshlands dossier and experiment with various forms of guidance.

Since the first inscriptions of cultural and natural properties on the World Heritage List in 1978, the process of nomination has dramatically evolved to become a long and complex exercise which the States Parties have to go through. Indeed, it is important to recall that the nomination of a property is a decision of the concerned State Party, based on a potential OUV it has defined. The nomination file has become a rich and dense document which has to provide a wide range of details about the site, its characteristics, its authenticity and integrity and, above all, the attributes which justify its nomination for potential World Heritage listing.

Experience has shown that States Parties generally face difficulties in the preparation of a nomination file due to the fact that this exercise requires a specific knowledge of the World Heritage Convention's mechanisms and trends. As part of an overall reflection on the future of the World Heritage Convention, the World Heritage Committee, in its Decision 33 COM 14.A2 para. 14 adopted in 2009 in Seville, recognized that challenges existed in the process for nominating a property to the World Heritage List. The World Heritage Committee also called for considering how best to respond to these challenges for more effective implementation of the Convention. This decision was adopted following the realization that States Parties, the WHC as the Secretariat of the Convention, the Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Committee were experiencing frustrations during the nomination process. Some States Parties were spending considerable time and money developing nominations which were delayed or unsuccessful. For their part, the Advisory Bodies were constrained in their ability to provide advice to States Parties on possible nominations due to lack of resources, the short schedule for the evaluation of nominations, and potential conflicts with evaluation processes. Furthermore, international assistance did not always result in successful nominations with the result that the World Heritage Committee was often faced with difficult pressured inscription decisions.¹³

With a view to exploring creative approaches to reduce the number of properties encountering significant problems in the nomination process, an expert meeting was convened in Phuket, Thailand, in April 2010 under the title "Upstream Processes to Nominations: Creative Approaches in the Nomination Process". Upstream processes were defined as all processes and practices occurring prior to the consideration by the World Heritage Committee of a property for inclusion on the World Heritage List. These encompass activities taking place at the national level before a property is included in the Tentative List, processes associated with the Tentative List, the processes of preparation and submission of a nomination and its evaluation, and the consideration of a nomination by the World Heritage Committee.¹⁴

The meeting resulted in a number of recommendations and options to be followed up by the WHC in cooperation with the Advisory Bodies and other relevant organizations so as to provide new forms of advice and feedback to States Parties in considering nominations before their preparation. Importantly, such guidance does not purport to guarantee that nominations will automatically be successful. Rather, the aim is to help State Parties identify the best protection mechanism for a property, clarify the complexity of the World Heritage system, offer guidance through the various requirements of the nomination dossier, develop the capacity of States Parties and communities to ensure the protection of properties and develop nominations, and manage the expectations of national stakeholders as regards inscription of a property.

Within the above perspective, upstream advisory guidance for the World Heritage nomination of the Iraqi Marshlands started being provided as early as 2008 when the Iraqi MoEnv, with the Marshlands in mind, called on UNESCO and IUCN to help Iraqi environment professionals improve their understanding of the World Heritage Convention. The State Party followed initial advice first by joining the CBD, and eventually by striving

¹³ See whc.unesco.org/en/events/673/.

¹⁴ See UNESCO. 2010. "Final report of the Expert meeting on 'Upstream Processes to Nominations: Creative Approaches in the Nomination Process', 27–29 April 2010, Phuket, Thailand", para. 7.

to build national and international support for the safeguarding of the Ahwar through the development of a management framework for the area meeting World Heritage standards. As of summer 2010, when the State Party made the decision to shift to the preparation of a nomination dossier, UNESCO and IUCN redefined the objective and scope of their upstream advice towards:

- Enhancing the capacity of the State Party to submit a complete nomination dossier for a complex mixed serial property (see Box 1) without however offering any guarantee that this nomination would result in the inscription of the property;
- Building the technical capacities of a pool of national experts to prepare nominations for natural, cultural or mixed sites following the Operational Guidelines and best practices;
- Supporting national efforts for long-term conservation planning of the natural and cultural values of the proposed property;
- Identifying governance, knowledge and law enforcement gaps related to the strategic and day-to-day management of the property;
- Establishing the core for a national mechanism to oversee the nomination of both cultural and natural sites on the World Heritage List and their conservation.

Irrespective of the opinion advisory organizations might have had about the potential or readiness of the property for inclusion on the World Heritage List, they committed to helping the State Party achieve the preparation of a nomination dossier, a process envisioned and designed as a capacity-building exercise (see Box 2) for the submission of various categories of nominations – cultural, natural, mixed and serial. The Marshlands nomination exercise fed along the way on the options proposed during the Phuket meeting, and on ideas developed by the WHC and the Advisory Bodies as they engaged more systematically with providing upstream advice to other States Parties. By nature, and throughout its implementation, the upstream guidance offered to the Government of Iraq for the Marshlands nomination remained experimental. Based on trial and error, it provided a rich terrain from which to draw on experiences and learn lessons from successes and failures that will be developed in Section 2 of this report.

Between 2008 (at a time when the property was still framed by the State Party as The Marshlands of Mesopotamia) and January 2014 (when the nomination dossier of The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities was submitted to the WHC), the upstream advisory process incorporated the following approaches:

- A very high level of coordination and synergy between UNEP, UNESCO, IUCN and, at a later stage, the ARC-WH to provide upstream advice and feedback at the request of Iraqi partners who included staff from several ministries and experts from civil society;
- Two successive training programmes, one for a broad range of decision makers and technical experts drawn from various ministries to improve their general awareness and understanding of World Heritage processes and requirements, the other for the natural and cultural heritage teams entrusted by their government with developing the management framework and the nomination dossier for the property. Training sessions took place in Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Bahrain, and Japan;

- The design of training modules and the mobilization of experts to cover all the main aspects of the World Heritage Convention, nomination process, dossier preparation, management planning for World Heritage sites, the collection of documentation, GIS and the development of maps, *etc.*
- The development of a mentoring system for the natural and cultural heritage teams allowing lead mentors and supporting experts to provide advice and guidance at several stages of the dossier preparation in-between and during workshops;
- The use of Arabic as the main mentoring and training language thanks to the recourse to Arabic-speaking experts who were also able to provide quasi-simultaneous translation of training delivered by non-Arabic experts. Supporting material in Arabic was used as much as possible, and the original management documents and nomination dossiers were prepared in that language. This approach was critical to ensure that adequate terminology was used and information not lost in translation;
- The preparation of a screening study for natural attributes carrying a potential OUV approved by IUCN prior to the start of the writing up of the dossier. The study allowed for advising the State Party on the natural values of the property and identifying threats to its integrity which the management system needed to address;
- In-depth consultations between the State Party and IUCN on the management system to be put in place to protect the property's integrity, and dedicated training on management planning for protected areas and World Heritage properties;
- Two background studies and a comprehensive list of bibliographical references on the cultural values of the property commissioned by UNESCO;
- A thorough revision of the description of the property on the Tentative List before starting the writing up of the nomination dossier. This description was submitted for assessment and feedback to two Advisory Bodies, IUCN for the natural values and ICOMOS for the cultural values;
- The provision of specific training and expertise to the national preparation teams to help them develop the comparative analysis, one of the most challenging sections of the nomination dossier. This included tutoring on the search tool on the World Heritage database, guidance through existing relevant thematic studies, and constant back-and-forth between English and Arabic to make sure that trainees understood the content of the reference materials;
- The involvement of decision makers and experts from the State Party in World Heritage Committee meetings and regional meetings to make them better aware of the nomination process and requirements;
- The management of the State Party's expectations throughout the process, by constantly reminding stakeholders involved that the ultimate focus of the project was to enhance the conservation of the property, that the nomination process was stringent, and that neither referral nor deferral should be taken as rebukes but as opportunities to improve the dossier and the property's conservation;
- Last but not least, the securing of the necessary funding to make all the above possible thanks to the IMELS and the Iraqi MoEnv.

BOX 1 - The challenges of preparing mixed and serial nominations

Out of 1,007 properties on the World Heritage List in July 2014, only 31 are mixed natural and cultural sites, two of them in Arab States. Besides the issue of balanced representation on the World Heritage List, mixed nominations have their own set of challenges.

The 2013 Operational Guidelines define mixed properties as those which satisfy part or the whole of the definitions of both cultural and natural heritage laid out in Articles 1 and 2 of the Convention (paragraph 46). Mixed properties should not be confused with cultural landscapes. Mixed properties are inscribed under at least one criterion (i) to (iv) and at least one criterion (vii) to (x), because they meet both criteria independently. The OUV of cultural landscapes, on the other hand, arises not from their natural or cultural qualities assessed independently but from the inter-relation between nature and culture. Cultural landscapes are identified under the cultural criteria. Such properties often have natural values, but usually not at the level to justify inscription under natural criteria. In the case they do, the property will be inscribed as a mixed site and a cultural landscape. For some mixed properties, the natural and cultural values are integrated and co-dependent. In other cases, the values may not be co-dependent but share the same geographic location.¹⁵

A mixed nomination does not necessarily imply a quantitative balance between the cultural and natural attributes or an equal number of hectares on the ground. Mixed properties are sometimes misconstrued as large natural sites encompassing some cultural elements albeit there is nothing in the Operational Guidelines setting such a rule. However a nomination which is submitted as a mixed site should cover both the cultural and natural aspects in a balanced and comprehensive way throughout the text, including the description of the proposed site, the justification of the OUV for nature and culture, its state of conservation, the factors affecting it, its protection and management and a selection of key indicators for measuring its state of conservation. Also, the comparative analysis should carefully take into account both the cultural and the natural values under which the nomination of the site is justified. The comparative analysis should present stand-alone arguments for culture on the one hand and nature on the other hand while ensuring complementarity and synergy between the two sets of values.

Mixed properties generally require more time at the stage of the nomination preparation, as they involve different stakeholders at the national, regional and local levels, typically the national authorities in charge of culture and heritage, and those in charge of the environment. In most cases these authorities are independent from each other and have different sets of mandates, legal mechanisms, management approaches as well as institutional, financial, technical and logistical capacities. Additional efforts are needed to ensure an optimal level of effective coordination between the two distinct authorities, an objective not easily attainable in regions of the world with weak governance systems.

¹⁵ Taken from UNESCO. 2011. "Preparing World Heritage Nominations". World Heritage Resource Manuals, at 33.

Nominations of mixed properties are evaluated jointly by IUCN and ICOMOS to ensure communication and coordination especially with regards to integrity and management aspects. However each Advisory Body also performs an independent evaluation to ensure that a satisfactory case is made for both natural and cultural values. Mixed nominations therefore require more coordination between the Advisory Bodies both during the upstream process and the evaluation.

In some cases, elements might be geographically disconnected and remote from one another, and creating one large boundary is not appropriate. This is a situation where a serial nomination might be more appropriate. Serial nominations involve two or more separate component parts, which together are of potential OUV. There must be a very clear rationale for the selection of the components, and this rationale must be based on the potential OUV and the attributes and features that the components demonstrate together. The comparative analysis must justify the selection of the components, as well as demonstrate that the series as a whole is of potential OUV.¹⁶ Furthermore, each component part must meet conditions of authenticity and integrity.

After a mixed transboundary nomination, a mixed serial property is the second most complex scenario for a nomination as it entails addressing all the following challenges:

1. Justifying the presence of OUV for both cultural and natural values;
2. Establishing that the two sets of values physically coexist in one site – as this is what forms the rationale for one single nomination rather than two separate ones;
3. Demonstrating the integrity and authenticity of the values within the boundaries of each of the serial property's component parts, and also that each component part contributes to the overall OUV of the complete property;
4. Developing comprehensive and consolidated management arrangements and mechanisms, including monitoring, for both the natural and cultural values of the property, and all its component parts – this entails advanced levels of inter-institutional communication, coordination and collaboration to design an effective governance system specifically for this type of property;
5. Aligning capacities and resources needed for the two sets of values and ensuring the integration and balance of these resources.

¹⁶ UNESCO, 2011: 77.

Box 2 - Capacity building for the implementation of the 1972 Convention

Capacity building for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention is recognized as a constant challenge, particularly for developing countries. It is also an intrinsic part of the upstream guidance for nominations. The World Heritage Committee adopted a World Heritage Capacity Building Strategy (WHCBS) in 2011. Developed jointly by several institutions within the World Heritage system, this strategy is premised on the UNDP definition of capacity as: "The ability of individuals, organizations and societies to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner".¹⁷

The main objectives of the WHCBS are to:

1. Strengthen the knowledge, abilities, skills and behaviours of people with direct responsibilities for heritage conservation and management;
2. Improve institutional structures and processes through empowering decision makers and policy makers; and
3. Introduce a more dynamic relationship between heritage and its context and, in turn, greater reciprocal benefits by a more inclusive approach.

To achieve these aims, the WHCBS promotes enhanced cooperation between the culture and nature sectors, and between the various actors within the World Heritage system, particularly the WHC, the Advisory Bodies to the WHC – namely IUCN, ICOMOS and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) – and training institutions within the UN system such as UNITAR and Category 2 Centres under the auspices of UNESCO, the latter being capacity-building institutions established in various regions of the world.

Under the WHCBS, these institutions work in synergy to organize technical seminars and workshops for States Parties and heritage professionals. They also develop guidance material (such as bibliographies, PowerPoint presentations, publications and their translations) on key aspects of the World Heritage Convention, together with capacity-building modules.

The WHCBS further provides for a regional dimension, with the development of regional-level strategies and programmes, and the training and involvement of a larger number of regional World Heritage experts. The first regional initiative was launched in 2011 in the Arab States. Within this context, the ARC-WH has contributed, since its creation in 2011,¹⁸ to a number of capacity-building activities for States Parties: these include support for the revision of Tentative Lists, the preparation of new nominations, the strengthening of the protection and management of selected World Heritage properties, and the translation into Arabic of the manual "Preparing World Heritage Nominations". In collaboration with the WHC, the ARC-WH furthermore trained regional experts in natural and cultural heritage to lead capacity-building exercises for States Parties. This made the ARC-WH a natural partner in the UNEP-UNESCO project "World Heritage nomination process as a tool to enhance the natural and cultural management of the Iraqi Marshlands". Between late 2012 and late 2013, the ARC-WH provided in-kind and logistical support for several workshops and coordination meetings leading to the completion of the nomination dossier of The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities.

¹⁷ UNDP. 2008. Capacity Development Practice Note.

¹⁸ The ARC-WH was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 2009. An agreement was signed between UNESCO and the Kingdom of Bahrain in 2010, and entered into force in December 2011.

2. PREPARING THE DOSSIER

By the time all key stakeholders agreed on the preparation of the nomination dossier as a primary outcome of the project, two immediate results were identified as key milestones for the process. The first result was to have a complete dossier ready for submission to the WHC. The original deadline set for the dossier finalization was January 2013. The second expected result was to set the foundation for a national team capable of preparing future nominations for both natural and cultural properties.

The dossier preparation followed a dual-track approach as the natural and cultural attributes and values of the property had to be addressed in parallel by two teams of national experts who benefited from targeted training and mentoring. Yet the two tracks met more than once to allow for a common understanding of the World Heritage requirements, and for coordination between the teams at several stages, in particular to identify the component parts of the serial property, define boundaries and buffer zones encompassing cultural and natural values, prepare maps incorporating all relevant data, and consolidate the two parts of the dossier.

The exercise was also multi-layered since it consisted of cumulative and partially overlapping stages such as forming the teams, identifying trainers and mentors, meeting the training needs of the teams, agreeing on the category of property, its extent, attributes and values, reporting to and requesting the endorsement of the Steering Committee, collating and analyzing documentation, producing maps, developing a management framework, writing up and revising the different sections of the dossier, and regularly adjusting the work-plan and the time-frame.

Faced with numerous challenges, none of the stages was straightforward: new team members joined after the training had already begun while others dropped out; mentors initially identified lacked sufficient experience or motivation to engage at the level demanded by the exercise and had to be replaced; some trainers, used to contributing direct input to nomination dossiers, had to refrain from making up for the shortcomings of far less experienced preparation team members; funding was erratic with long periods where no activity could be organized, and short periods where several workshops had to be concentrated; logistics were complicated by the security situation which prevented holding workshops in Baghdad or southern Iraq, and impeded regular site visits by preparation team members; any change in the dossier, particularly as regards the criteria selected, entailed the revision of boundaries and buffer zones, and hence maps and the management framework. Last but not least, the publicity made in Iraq around the nomination created expectations among the public and decision makers, and the Steering Committee had to resist pressure to submit the dossier before it was completed.

All the expected and unexpected challenges mentioned above led to the decision to wait until January 2014 to submit the dossier. The preparation therefore lasted two full years (from February 2012 to January 2014) with a marked acceleration over the last six months. The following sections describe the main consecutive (and at times overlapping) stages of the process.¹⁹

2.1 From a cultural landscape to a mixed serial site

The dossier preparation began in earnest in February 2012 after several months when the Government of Italy, hit by the Euro crisis, suspended its funding for the project. In the

meantime, the MoEnv had looked for experts who could contribute different disciplinary approaches to the dossier, and nominated members of the nature preparation team. Building upon the screening study, IUCN-ROWA organized two successive training workshops in management planning for protected areas with participants drawn from several ministries and NGOs, some of whom had been appointed as members of the nature preparation team. In parallel, the SBAH pursued archaeological surveys in the Marshlands, started excavations at selected sites, and nominated members of the culture preparation team.

The February 2012 inception workshop that UNESCO Iraq organized was the first time the two preparation teams came together under the leadership of Dr Ali Al-Lami, the Chair of the National Steering Committee. Fourteen members attended the workshop on behalf of the nature team: half of them technical staff of the MoEnv (including staff from the provinces of Dhi Qar, Maysan and Basra), one each from the MoWR-CRIM, Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works, and Ministry of Sciences and Technology. The team also included two academics from the Baghdad University Museum of Natural History, and one staff member from Nature Iraq. Their combined expertise covered hydrology, geology, animal biology, physics, agronomy, archaeology and GIS. The culture team was composed of five archaeologists, all of them staff from SBAH including the three heads of Departments of Archaeology in Dhi Qar, Maysan and Basra.

Not all the team members were new to World Heritage requirements: several among the nature team had attended the previous IUCN-ROWA workshops on protected area management where Tobias Garstecki had introduced them to the basics of World Heritage. However, to allow for building of a common knowledge-base shared by all team members, it was necessary to dedicate the first day to the presentation of World Heritage fundamentals – notions of OUV, integrity and authenticity; cultural and natural criteria; categories of sites; and the delineation of boundaries and buffer zones – and to clarify the challenges inherent to mixed nominations in terms of dossier preparation and management requirements (see Box 1). Another long session focused on the identification of information gaps and discussion on the methods to fill them. It sparked a debate on what constituted internationally accepted scientific evidence. Team members were brought to realize that a different regime of knowledge in support of the Marshlands' OUV was needed than the one prevalent in Iraq to justify the site's prominence as a national and global icon. This opened up whole new perspectives and challenges since several studies on the biodiversity and archaeology of the Marshlands were still on-going, or not published in peer-reviewed journals and only available in unpublished reports in Arabic.

On the second day, the presentation of the property on Iraq's Tentative List was submitted to a collective critical reading informed by World Heritage notions. It became clear to the team members that this description did not attempt to present the site within a World Heritage perspective, making no reference to potential OUV nor identifying any World Heritage criteria applying to the property. Other noted issues were the inconsistency between the site's description and its categorizing as mixed, and the paucity of indications of its natural attributes. As described, the site was found to fall within the category of cultural landscape since its main highlighted attributes were the symbiotic lifestyle of the Marsh dwellers with the wetland environment maintained over a very long period of time and resulting in specific tangible cultural features, particularly reed buildings. It was noted,

¹⁹ A complete list of training workshops organized to support the capacity-building process or attended by preparation team members between 2008 and 2014 is available in the Annex.

however, that the description's main focus was on the factors that had caused this cultural landscape to be almost totally obliterated in the previous decades. Within World Heritage categories, the site therefore appeared more precisely as a relict cultural landscape.²⁰ A final important conclusion was that the Marshlands' natural and cultural features as they were described in the Tentative List submission seemed so severely degraded that the property's integrity, even as a relict, was under serious question, and so would be the site's eligibility for inscription on the World Heritage List.

It was therefore agreed that the Tentative List submission did not reflect the current status of the Marshlands. Since the time when the Government of Iraq had placed the property on its Tentative List, change had happened in the Marshlands allowing for a partial, but nonetheless highly significant hydrological restoration closely monitored through a host of international projects (see Section 1.2). However, less was publicly known about ecosystem recovery, a reality that raised the question of the documentation available to support the World Heritage case of the Marshlands. Most of the efforts to assess the impacts of the re-flooding had been undertaken by Nature Iraq as part of the national programme addressing the KBA. The programme included numerous field visits to the various components of the Ahwar by national and international experts and specialists from the various fields of ecology. Although not fully systematic or detailed, the research associated with the



Village in the marshes © Mudhafar Salim



Women of the marshes sorting out reeds
© Mudhafar Salim



Mudskipper, a subtidal fish © Mudhafar Salim

²⁰ According to the Operational Guidelines, Annex 3 (I, 10, ii), a relict (or fossil) landscape is a subcategory of an organically evolved cultural landscape in which an evolutionary process came to an end at some time in the past, either abruptly or over a period. Its significant distinguishing features are, however, still visible in material form.

assessment yielded strong evidence of ecosystem restoration in significant parts of the Ahwar including confirmed records for key fauna and flora. Furthermore, the environmental assessments conducted in the context of some major oil-related exploration and extraction programmes in and around the Ahwar confirmed self-restoration trends and yielded data on size and diversity of habitat recovery. One factor which played a major role in making recent data available to the nature preparation team was that several of its members were involved in the KBA programme and/or in environmental assessments performed in the Ahwar.

As for the property's cultural attributes, the socio-economic survey conducted by UNEP in 2007, in addition to smaller-scale studies and anecdotal evidence, showed that there was a trend of return to the Marshlands by members of communities displaced in previous decades. The scale of this move was however not ascertained. Furthermore, none of the existing studies looked specifically into how much remained of the wetland-based lifestyle of Marsh dwellers, particularly their material manifestations such as reed buildings. Rather, there were indications that the integrity of the Marshlands landscape had been affected by recent developments such as the building of roads, housing projects, and infrastructure to serve the local population. Finally, the question was posed as to the willingness of the Marsh dwellers to revert to their previous lifestyle, or even to support regulations protecting the material remains of this largely defunct way of life. On the one hand, a far-ranging information and consultation campaign with concerned communities (including those who might consider returning to areas from which they were once displaced) appeared extremely challenging to conduct in the Iraqi context. On the other hand, a top-down protection initiative was not a governance model condoned by the World Heritage Convention, even for the purpose of safeguarding heritage.

In their efforts to reassess the attributes and values of the property, the preparation teams found background studies instrumental as they opened up the possibility of considering the property not as a cultural landscape but rather as a mixed property with two separate sets of natural and cultural values.

The screening study commissioned by IUCN concretely and scientifically established for the first time the potential natural OUV of the property under criteria (ix) and (x) (see Box 4). Contributing to the case under criterion (ix), the study included a long list of natural systems and processes such as species migration across their adaptation. As for criterion (x), the study looked at numbers and distribution of mammals, birds, amphibians and other taxa so as to argue the site's significance for globally threatened species. Although promising, the screening study also highlighted the numerous challenges facing the nomination under the natural criteria (the oil industry, agricultural development, lack of environmental and conservation-driven policies, weak legislation and institutional capacities for the sustainable management of natural resources, *etc.*).

Despite the above, the MoEnv decided that it was in the property's higher interest to pursue the adoption of a natural nomination of the Ahwar. This nomination was expected to promote the importance of the rehabilitation and conservation of the site's biodiversity at the local and national levels, secure the much needed political interest and commitment geared towards a more sustainable approach to the development of the site in recognition of its global significance, build local and national capacities in the field of natural heritage conservation, protected area management and sustainable natural resources utilization, and finally encourage more national and international investment in the rehabilitation and conservation of the Ahwar as a site of national and global importance.

As for the archaeological survey commissioned by UNESCO and undertaken by a former SBAH staff member in late 2011, it identified over 100 small to medium-sized sites previously under water, usually in the form of archaeological mounds (tells). All periods of the ancient history of Southern Mesopotamia up to the early Islamic era were represented. In a few cases, surface material could be dated as early as the Ubaid period (c. 6,500 to 3,800 BCE). The bibliographical survey on the cultural heritage of the Ahwar also listed recent publications by a handful of international scholars already aware of these discoveries and building upon them to reconsider the area's historical significance, particularly in relation to large urban centres developed on the edges of the Marshlands in ancient Mesopotamia. On the basis of this information, discussions during the Amman workshop gave consideration to cultural criteria (iii) and (v). Criterion (vi) was also discussed with reference to the story of the great flood present in the Bible and the Qur'an and rooted in Mesopotamian literature. Yet building an argument for this criterion required scholarly expertise that was not available among SBAH staff (see Box 4). The cultural heritage trainers finally remarked that the way the preparation team envisioned the conjunction of criteria (iii) and (v) – by positing a direct continuity between ancient Mesopotamian populations and cultures, and contemporary Marsh dwellers – was problematic since there was no unquestionable scientific evidence to support this claim.

Another key issue discussed during the workshop was the geographical extent and design of the property. The coordinates given in the Tentative List referred to all of the historical Ahwar which, before the major drainage campaigns commenced in the 1970s, formed an almost uninterrupted wetland fluctuating between 5,000 and 20,000 km² and extending partly over Iran. It appeared, however, that there was neither an official definition of what constituted the Marshlands today, nor a consensus among members of the Steering Committee and preparation teams on the area(s) that should be considered under the nomination. Some referred to the Marshlands in their extent of the 1970s as recorded by scientific research and aerial photographs. Others referred to their extent after the partial post-2003 reflooding where the three main previously contiguous regions – the Central, Hammar and Huweizah Marshes – were now separated by considerable expanses of dry land, and where the Hammar was split into western and eastern marshes.



Ubaid pottery and freshwater shells, Eridu, 2014
© Géraldine Chatelard



Landscape of the West Hammar Marshes
© Mudhafar Salim



East Hammar Marshes, 2014 © Géraldine Chatelard

BOX 3 - How vast are the Ahwar?

The Ahwar are highly dynamic as a combined hydrological and ecological system. As a result, the surface area of the Ahwar has always been variable throughout history, influenced by numerous natural and human-induced factors. Recent historical records from the early 20th century estimate the area to range from 5,000 km² all the way to 20,000 km². This variability depends on a number of factors/criteria including timing, the source of information, and the approach adopted for its calculation.

Timing: In terms of seasonality or historic stages of development. On an annual basis, the Ahwar reach their maximum extent during the flood season. Conversely, the flooded surface area is minimal during the dry season when only permanent marshes are covered with water. Furthermore, the body of water was much larger before the draining initiated in the 1970s than after.

Source of information: As a natural phenomenon, the Ahwar can be approached either as a hydrological or ecological system. From a hydrological perspective, only areas covered with permanent or open water bodies are considered Ahwar. From an ecological perspective, the surface area of the Ahwar is much bigger.

Technical approach: Advances in remote-sensing technologies have allowed for an estimation of the surface area of the Ahwar which is different and more accurate than before.

Although it is challenging to reach a full consensus on the current size of the Ahwar, there is a general agreement among all concerned parties that the pre-1970 draining estimation should be taken as a baseline. Most importantly, the surface area included in the World Heritage nomination dossier comprises the core of both the hydrological and ecological systems.

One important suggestion put forth by the trainers was that since the Marshlands today corresponded to several discrete areas, then the State Party might have to consider a serial nomination to encompass all the property's attributes carrying the OUV under the selected criteria. Initially, this idea did not fare well with either the Steering Committee or most preparation team members. All feared that it was beyond their capacity to develop an evidence-based argument for several component parts. They also questioned whether effective protection and conservation could be achieved for a property much more extensive than the one they had initially envisioned to nominate. Rather, the Steering Committee was in favour of focusing the nomination on the Central Marshes which was about to be designated a national park under the jurisdiction of the MoEnv.

The relevance of naming the property Marshlands of Mesopotamia was also questioned considering that Mesopotamia referred to a vast geocultural area in the ancient Near East, a small part of which extended into today's Iran. Using this term to identify a region of modern Iraq was perceived as anachronistic and geographically misleading by the training team. "Marshlands of Southern Iraq" was therefore adopted as a working name for the property.

One of the results of the workshop was to agree on the capacity-building methodology. Each team was to be guided throughout the process by a dedicated mentor with whom teams would meet at regular intervals to assess progress against the work-plan, and who would be available between workshops to provide guidance and feedback on every aspect of the dossier preparation. It was also agreed that the original copy of the dossier would be written in Arabic, and that mentors should have a working knowledge of both English and Arabic. Along the way, mentors would be in a position to evaluate the training needs of the team members to complete all sections of the dossier, and would convey these needs to UNEP, UNESCO and IUCN. The latter organizations would in turn identify financial and human resources available to conduct additional trainings or support members to attend training offered by other organizations, for example the UNITAR session on the conservation and management of World Heritage sites taking place yearly in Japan.

The training team concluded the workshop with the following recommendations incorporated into a work plan setting the main stages for completing the capacity-building exercise and the dossier preparation:

- Restructuring the preparation teams was necessary to improve work efficiency and provide adequate and comprehensive content to the dossier. It was suggested to split the nature team into a core group charged with writing up the relevant sections of the dossier and more engaged in the training programme, and support members on call to contribute additional data and input. The culture team, which lacked multidisciplinary, could be reinforced by the inclusion of a historian and an anthropologist familiar with scholarship on southern Iraq, and could similarly be split into core and support members. To facilitate coordination and communication with the mentors and the other team, each team would nominate a focal point.
- A comprehensive rewriting of the description of the property on the Tentative List was to be performed. The revised text was to be prepared using the Tentative List submission format available on UNESCO World Heritage web pages, and be complete with coordinates of the property – including each component part in case it was decided to nominate a serial site. This document would summarize all major natural and cultural features and attributes of the property, and it would have to be endorsed by the National Steering Committee to form the official basis for the nomination.
- Several key studies conducted by Iraqi organizations and/or researchers in recent years that could support the justification of the Marshlands' OUV under the criteria selected were not available in English and at times were not even publicly released in Arabic. This was expected to negatively affect the evaluation of the nomination by the Advisory Bodies. Concerned Iraqi institutions were therefore invited to consider releasing and/or translating significant reports on the hydrology, biodiversity, history and archaeology of the property. In addition, the most important findings would gain credibility by appearing in international peer-reviewed publications.

BOX 4 - Criteria considered for the nomination of the proposed property

Cultural criteria

(iii) To bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;

(v) To be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

(vi) To be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);

Natural criteria

(ix) To be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;

(x) To contain the most important and significant natural habitats for *in-situ* conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.



Flooded margins of the central marshes © Mudhafar Salim

2.2 Forming the preparation teams

Following the recommendations of the training team, the MoEnv and the MoTA worked towards restructuring the two preparation teams. The process took several months and a few more workshops until teams were consolidated around the right mix of junior, mid-career and senior members which in itself represented a major achievement. Mentors identified by UNESCO Iraq and allocated to each team proved instrumental in assessing members' capacities and potential to be part of the core writing teams of the nomination dossier. The leadership structure of each team was slightly different but in both cases the two young professionals acting as focal points on the basis of competence, personal qualities and consensus emerged as real team leaders who ensured the sustained engagement of other team members and the meeting of objectives and deadlines.

2.2.1 *The natural heritage team*

The final consolidation of the nature team took place during the workshop held in Bahrain in June 2013 to revise the description of the property on the Tentative List. By then, the core nature team comprised seven members with complementary expertise tasked with contributing direct input to, and writing up, the various sections of the dossier. Another seven people who had attended the inception workshop and had been introduced to the fundamentals of World Heritage agreed to play a supporting but crucial role: accessing data scattered in a variety of institutions both in Baghdad and in the provinces, and publicizing the nomination among national and local stakeholders. The core nature team was multidisciplinary and was orchestrated by a senior policy maker from the MoEnv. It comprised young environment professionals from government institutions, two senior academics willing to share their knowledge, and a team leader who worked with a local environmental NGO. This allowed for coherence, and a rather straightforward distribution of roles and responsibilities. The Steering Committee Chair, although not nominally a member of the nature team, played a leadership role.

Ali Al-Lami: The Chair of the National Steering Committee ensured overall supervision of the nomination dossier preparation as well as the development of the management planning framework. He provided the vision and the thrust to realize it, and took the role of overall motivator, strategic instructor and the prime institutional and political liaison between national stakeholders and with international partners and stakeholders. He was instrumental in making available all possible national resources and means to support the process including the head-hunting and selection of key team members and associates to whom he provided support and guidance throughout the process.

Mudhafar Salim: The leader and focal point of the nature team for both the nomination dossier and the management framework. A staff member of Nature Iraq, he was a conservation specialist with a particular specialty in biodiversity planning, bird classification and conservation, in addition to stakeholder engagement. He enjoyed over ten years of field experience in the Ahwar and other key biodiversity areas in Iraq. Endowed with strong leadership and facilitation qualities, he was assigned the team leader role under the direct supervision of the Steering Committee Chair. He also had a relatively strong command of the English language both conversational and written.

Ali Haloob: The lead plant taxonomy and conservation specialist in the team, a promising young professional with well established field experience associated with the Ahwar and other projects undertaken by various Iraqi academic institutions. He was instrumental in

facilitating the writing of the plant conservation sections of the dossier as well as the management plans, and was an excellent liaison person with the MoEnv, of which he was a staff member, and academic institutions. He was also the team's focal point for the comparative analysis.

Shayma' Kareem: The lead person on all components related to water resources and irrigation from strategy to field operations. A staff member of the MoWR, she provided critical support to the dossier and management framework through the provision of needed information, data, and documentation while establishing a strong coordination link between the two main ministries with authority over the natural components of the Ahwar.

Aqeel Al-Zubaidi: A renowned professor from the University of Baghdad Natural Heritage Museum, specializing in geology, geomorphology and other physical environment components, he orchestrated the development of the dossier sections on the physical environment as well as the management framework, and provided senior advice to other team members on scientific writing.

Mohammed Al-Sudani: Another established professor from the University of Baghdad Natural Heritage Museum, specializing in zoology, biodiversity and taxonomy, he supervised the sections of the dossier dealing with animal taxa, with specific contributions on reptiles and fish, and also offered guidance to the team on scientific writing.

Donya Al-Taweel: The assistant to the Steering Committee Chair, and a staff member of the MoEnv, she was in charge of maintaining communication channels with the Chair and was the liaison person with the mentors, trainers and experts. She provided day-to-day support and guidance to the nature team through monitoring the progress made against agreed work-plan and time-lines and ensuring that team members were submitting deliverables on time.

Waleed Khaled: The GIS specialist in the team and the prime translator of all specialist information into easily readable maps. His support role was critical for the successful finalization of the dossier and management framework. A staff member of the MoEnv, he worked with all nature team members and the GIS specialist of the culture team to develop the required sets of maps and figures including administrative boundaries, plants, animals, physical environment, and management zoning.

2.2.2 The cultural heritage team

After several changes in its composition, the core culture team was consolidated during the workshop organized in Amman on 16-20 June 2013 to revise the Tentative List text. One historian and one GIS specialist were added to five archaeologists. All members were SBAH staff, and all but one based in Baghdad. Local staff from Antiquity Directorates in the concerned provinces supported with field data.

Ayad Kadhum: Recently hired by the SBAH to head its World Heritage Unit, he had just obtained a Ph.D. in Islamic history. As holder of the highest university degree, he was appointed team leader. For the dossier preparation, he coordinated research about the ancient history of the Marshlands in Arabic sources, led the only field visit the preparation team was able to undertake to the cultural sites, maintained communication with Antiquities staff in the southern provinces to collect data, and was the primary contact person for the project at SBAH in Baghdad.

Qahtan Al-Abeed: The focal point and shadow leader of the team, he was Head of the Basra

Antiquities and Heritage Directorate. A mid-career archaeologist with strong management and field experience in the southern Iraqi provinces, he was the only member having previously worked with international colleagues and with some command of English, mostly conversational. Under the supervision of Ayad Kadhūm, he ensured communication with the culture mentor and the leader of the nature team. He was also charged with writing two essential sections in the dossier: the justification for inscription and the comparative analysis.

Eman Al-Shammari: A specialist in Mesopotamian archaeology with past field experience and the most senior member of the team, she was charged with the topographical description and state of conservation sections for the cultural sites and the development of a cultural management framework.

Safiya Ismaeel: A junior archaeologist charged with administrative tasks at the Department of International Organizations of the SBAG, she performed research in the central SBAH archives where she mined excavation reports and conservation records for data on all concerned sites. She assisted Eman Al-Shammari in writing the state of conservation section and cultural management framework.

Ahmed Hashim: Head of the Studies and Research Section of the SBAH, he was an archaeologist with experience in journalism and the writing of cultural monographs for the general public. He assisted the team leader with researching and writing the historical description of the property.

Riyadh Hatem: The GIS specialist in the team, he worked with all the culture team members and the GIS specialist in the nature team to develop the required sets of maps and figures including administrative boundaries, plants, animals, physical environment, and management zoning.

2.3 Leaders, mentors and trainers

Leadership proved critical at every stage of the dossier preparation to maintain the internal cohesion of each team and the coordination between them, and ensure the commitment of Iraqi political and institutional decision makers throughout the process. A two-tiered leadership system was put in place in which the Steering Committee Chair played an overarching role driving the nomination process, and liaising between the Steering Committee, the two preparation teams, and the international organizations involved in supporting the capacity-building exercise. The focal points appointed from within each preparation team reported to the Steering Committee Chair on progress and obstacles, maintained communication with the mentors who reviewed their work, and ensured that team members received the necessary feedback from the mentors and performed their respective tasks according to schedule.

Following the February 2012 workshop, the natural heritage team was allocated a regional mentor, Tarek Abulhawa, experienced in World Heritage planning, protected area management, as well as conservation knowledge development. His primary role was to coach the team through the various stages of the preparation of the nomination dossier for the natural components as well as the development of management frameworks for both the natural and cultural components. It proved more challenging to identify a mentor for the cultural heritage team. A first regional mentor was appointed following the February 2012 workshop but this person was not able to engage at the level demanded by the

exercise. Géraldine Chatelard, Culture Programme Specialist at the UNESCO Iraq Office, finally assumed that role as of early 2013. A historian and social anthropologist specializing in the Middle East, she had some knowledge of Iraq and World Heritage processes, and knew enough Arabic to communicate with the team and read the drafts they produced. Her previous academic experience advising research students was instrumental in helping her guide the team throughout the dossier preparation.

The mentors helped the preparation teams throughout the nomination process using the Operational Guidelines as a basis. Practically, this guidance consisted in facilitating group discussions and drafting exercises for the various sections of the dossier during workshops, helping with development and adjustment of work plans, being available to team members in-between workshops to answer questions and facilitate access to information (from the World Heritage website, thematic studies prepared by ICOMOS and IUCN, World Heritage documents, and documentation on the property in English). The mentors were backed by resource persons at the IUCN World Heritage Programme and the WHC, and by the whole team of trainers.

Mentors were not supposed to be prescriptive nor more knowledgeable than preparation team members. Rather, they accompanied team members during the learning process; together with the trainers, they sowed in the minds of the trainees new heritage concepts and approaches, and new ways of presenting an argument to address an audience of World Heritage specialists and international academics. When pressure on team members to deliver was high, mentors played the role of catalysts, forcing team members to shift their ways of thinking. They also played a supportive role when the morale of the teams was low, and created awareness among them of how much they had learned and changed in the process.

Both mentors maintained a high level of communication between themselves to monitor the progress of the two teams against set deadlines and suggest adjustments to the training programme whenever needed. Proposed adjustments were discussed jointly through a decision-making structure comprising of the Steering Committee Chair and project coordinators at UNEP, UNESCO, IUCN and the ARC-WH. They were generally endorsed thanks to concerted efforts – administrative, financial and/or logistical – by all parties.

The team of regional and international trainers assembled by UNEP, UNESCO and IUCN was mobilized for a series of workshops. Their main role was to impart knowledge on issues related to World Heritage requirements, the methodology for preparing a nomination, and natural and cultural heritage management for protected areas and World Heritage sites. The regional expertise of several of the trainers was key to grounding theoretical knowledge in practical examples relevant for the Marshlands case and to which the preparation teams could relate. Trainers were also solicited to double as working group facilitators and, on more than one occasion, they played the role of catalysts, forcing preparation teams to radically shift approaches to the scope and size of the property, its attributes and values, and the nature and type of supporting evidence.

BOX 5 - Organizational structure of the nomination preparation

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE NOMINATION PREPARATION		
FUNCTION	ORGANIZATIONS	
Lead the nomination process	<p>National Steering Committee for the World Heritage Nomination and Management of the Marshlands (Steering Committee): MoEnv, MoWR, MoTA, MoC, Ministry of Planning, Heads of Marshlands Committees in Maysan, Basra and Dhi Qar Chaired by Dr Ali Al-Lami (MoEnv) (providing vision and thrust to the preparation teams; maintaining political support)</p>	
Write the nomination dossier	Cultural Heritage Preparation Team	Natural Heritage Preparation Team
Provide financial support	International donor: IMELS	For activities inside Iraq: MoEnv
Provide administrative support	<p>UNDP-DTIE-IETC as lead implementing agency</p> <p>UNESCO Iraq for cultural component IUCN-ROWA for natural component</p>	National partners: MoEnv & MoTA
Provide technical input	UNESCO Iraq Office & WHC; IUCN-ROWA & World Heritage Programme; regional/international mentors and advisers	National partners: MoTA, MoEnv, MoWR, Nature Iraq
Provide logistical support	Workshops in Bahrain: ARC-WH	Site field visits: MoEnv, MoTA, MoWR

2.4 Redefining cultural attributes

The nature team had confirmed the selection of natural criteria (ix) and (x) since the February 2012 inception workshops and had actively started to consult relevant documentation on the property to build a case for its World Heritage value. By contrast, the culture team were uncertain, for an extended period of time, about the most significant cultural attributes of the property although there was general agreement that criteria (iii) and (v) were relevant. A key milestone for the culture track was reached in December 2012 during a two-day workshop hosted by the ARC-WH in Bahrain with three members of the nature team, the focal point of the culture team, and the Director General of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Department at the Iraqi Ministry of Culture who was invited to contribute insight into available documentation on the culture of Marsh dwellers. A staff member of the WHC provided training and facilitation to help the Iraqi participants make progress on how to approach a serial and mixed nomination, and to tackle the requirements of integrity and authenticity.

With criterion (v) in mind, the culture team had worked out a list of archaeological and historical elements testifying to the significance of the Marshlands environment and resources for early Mesopotamian cultures. It appeared from the workshop discussions that the overwhelming majority of these elements were found in the ancient urban centres (such as Eridu, Ur, Uruk and Lagash) which, at the time of their development, were surrounded by marshes. The question was therefore posed if, to meet the requirement of integrity, the most important and best preserved of these centres should be included in the nomination and, if yes, whether this was relevant under criterion (iii). Such a decision entailed enlarging the geographical focus of the property to incorporate not only current but also historical marshes. On the basis of the bibliography of available sources on the cultural heritage of the Marshlands commissioned by UNESCO, trainers further pointed at new approaches in the fields of Assyriology and archaeology which proposed that the development of early urban centres in southern Mesopotamia was in large part dependent upon the presence of marshes. Due to a lack of sufficient English language skills, members of the culture team were however not able to read this recent trend of scholarship. To allow the culture team to form an opinion regarding the relevance of focusing the nomination on the historical relation between the Marshlands and major Mesopotamian cities, UNESCO Iraq offered to prepare a background study summarizing new scholarly approaches in the field, and to have this study translated into Arabic.²¹

The major challenge the cultural team faced was the lack of up-to-date information they had access to. They consulted reference publications on the archaeology of southern Iraq dating from the 1950s to 1980s and which are available in Arabic. They did not have access to or could not read recent books and articles published in English. They were not familiar with new theories and research approaches.

Alessandra Peruzzetto, archaeologist and trainer for the culture team

²¹ Wojtowicz, M. 2013. "Review of recent scholarship on the Marshlands and the development of urbanization in southern Mesopotamia". Amman: UNESCO Iraq Office.

For IUCN, one of the main lessons learned from the Marshlands dossier exercise is the importance of global science at an early stage of investigating the feasibility of a nomination.

Tim Badman, Director, IUCN World Heritage Programme

The culture team, through the voice of its focal point, also argued that a case could be made for including, under criteria (iii) and (v), the physical attributes of the culture of Marsh dwellers and their associated intangible value as testimonies of a very ancient yet disappearing cultural tradition developed in symbiosis with its natural environment. The staff member from the Ministry of Culture who attended the workshop informed the participants that there was no research data on the status of cultural features related to the Marsh dwellers, and undertaking such a research project on the scale required to produce the high-quality comprehensive information needed for the dossier would require human and financial resources that would be impossible to mobilize within a limited time. On this basis, the team decided with regret to leave aside this aspect of the property's cultural attributes until enough documentary evidence could be gathered. In the event that the property should be included on the World Heritage List, the State Party could eventually request a revision of its cultural attributes and OUV together with, if necessary, the criteria under which it had been inscribed.

The relevance of presenting the property under criterion (v) was also thoroughly debated during the workshop. The culture team focal point was convinced that only under this criterion could an argument be built to include in a single nomination Mesopotamian sites located in the historical marshes, and the natural attributes of the contemporary Marshlands. By contrast, the nature team feared that this criterion would lead to the site being categorized as a cultural landscape, and might jeopardize the chances of the property being inscribed under natural criteria.



Consolidation workshop, Amman, December 2013 © MoEnv



The Ur site and ziggurat, 2014 © Geraldine Chatelard.

2.5 Revising the description of the property on the Tentative List

Because the approach to the property had shifted significantly, trainers and mentors alike supported the idea that the two teams' first task should be to thoroughly revise the description of the property as it had been submitted for inclusion on the Tentative List of Iraq in 2003, and as it appeared on the World Heritage database. This was first and foremost a didactic decision. To perform this task, the two teams were convened separately in June 2013 for several consecutive days under the guidance of their respective mentors, and with several specialized trainers, to agree on a final list of natural and cultural attributes and criteria, the number of component parts of the serial property, the overall design of the boundaries, and a new name for the property conveying its values more clearly.

The revised text reflected the following choices:

- Criteria (ix) and (x) for the natural attributes and the development of the argument that the property represented an outstanding example of biological processes and biodiversity in an arid environment.
- On the basis of the background study prepared by UNESCO on latest approaches to the history of early urbanization in Southern Mesopotamia, the property was presented under cultural criterion (iii) with its values lying in its contribution to early urban civilization in the Near East. On the basis of the objections presented by the nature team, criterion (v) was not selected.
- The inclusion in the nomination of four marsh areas and four major Mesopotamian cultural sites to ensure that all key values critical to the biodiversity of the property and its historical significance were incorporated. At some point, six marsh areas were considered but this number was brought down after the team realized that the additional components did not meet the requirement of integrity in the face of oil exploitation and other developments.
- The name of the property was changed to Marshlands of Southern Iraq: Biodiversity Sanctuary and Heartland of the Sumerian Civilization.

The two texts produced by the teams were then merged into a single one. Maps roughly sketching out the boundaries of each component were appended. The revision produced

a rather long document of some 4,000 words, an unusual size for a Tentative List submission. Yet this length was justified as it helped harmonize national perspectives on a complex property. Two language versions, English and Arabic, were created. Translation was performed through exchanges between mentors and team members to ensure the use of adequate World Heritage terminology on the basis of the official English and Arabic texts of the Convention together with the Arabic version of the 2005 Operational Guidelines, since more recent updates had not been translated into that language.

The Arabic version was submitted for endorsement to the Steering Committee where representatives of all institutional stakeholders at the national and provincial level sat. The Steering Committee Chair, supported by the focal points of the two preparation teams, convincingly advocated for a serial nomination in order to meet the requirements of integrity. After the text was endorsed, it was shared with non-core members of the culture and nature teams who were able to convey its content to a larger section of stakeholders in the field. Besides clarifying the national vision for the property and spreading it among different groups of stakeholders, the document also served to disseminate World Heritage concepts and terminology in Arabic with which very few people were familiar in Iraq.

Concomitantly, the English version of the text was submitted for feedback to IUCN and ICOMOS. IUCN's comments related mostly to the threats bearing upon the integrity of the natural values of the property, namely oil exploration and extraction. They were addressed at a later stage of the dossier preparation when drawing the final boundaries of the various component parts and in the management framework. As for ICOMOS, the expert consulted considered that the cultural components of the property could make stand-alone cases for World Heritage nomination, and that an exclusive focus on the Sumerian period for each of these components did not do justice to their value during previous and later periods of ancient Mesopotamian history. On this basis, ICOMOS recommended submitting a cultural nomination separately from a natural one. This recommendation was thoroughly discussed and eventually rejected by the culture team who defended the case for a mixed nomination on the basis of recent scholarship. The Steering Committee endorsed this opinion and decided to keep working towards a single nomination. However, ICOMOS's advice was not completely lost on the culture team. First, the temporal scope considered for the cultural components was broadened, and boundaries were adjusted to incorporate significant archaeological features dating from other periods of Mesopotamian history. Furthermore, the advice provided by ICOMOS helped the culture team eventually to convince the nature team that criterion (v) should be added to bolster the link between the natural and cultural components of the property.

The WHC was consulted in mid-2013 and advised against an official submission by the State Party of a modification of the name and description of the property on the Tentative List. This advice was grounded in the instructions of paragraph 65 of the 2013 Operational Guidelines stating that Tentative Lists should be submitted to the Secretariat of the Convention at least one year prior to the submission of a nomination. Considering the major changes in the nature and proposed OUV of the property, the revised text for the Marshlands would have been equivalent to the inclusion of a new site in Iraq's Tentative List. Therefore, had the State Party requested such a modification in June 2013, the Secretariat would not have been able to accept the submission of the property's nomination in January 2014.

The new approach to the Marshlands nomination was therefore not reflected in the World Heritage database. Nevertheless, the importance of the revised description lay elsewhere. On the one hand, the text adopted was a unified guiding document owned and supported

by all key national stakeholders who were represented in the dialogue process. In the Iraqi context, where top-down decision making has remained the rule, updating, disseminating and seeking endorsement of the property's description represented a unique opportunity for national dialogue, consultation and inclusive decision making even if the process fell short of a fully fledged national consultation.

On the other hand, the revised text formed a first mini-blueprint of the nomination dossier which helped to set a final work plan with allocation of tasks, a training plan, and the setting of deadlines for writing the full dossier. The text included a brief description of the property with its various component parts, the justification for the nomination as a mixed serial property including the key statements on natural and cultural values under each of the criteria selected, the overall conservation status of the property in terms of integrity and authenticity, a summary of the key issues and challenges faced by the property, a preliminary list of sites against which to develop the comparative analysis, and finally a brief on the management arrangements including the status of the management plans and their associated elements of objectives, actions and monitoring.

It is important to note that few of the main elements in the revised text were changed until the finalization and submission of the complete nomination dossier to the WHC. This demonstrates the effectiveness of adopting a bottom-up approach in the contextualization of any nomination dossier as it brings all national and international views on board at the inception of the process.

Furthermore, the workshops during which the two teams worked separately on updating the Tentative List submission were of particular importance as they revealed the level of writing capacity of each of the team members, clarified the amount of effort actually needed to complete the dossier within the anticipated deadline of January 2014, and exposed the information gaps that needed to be filled for the successful completion of the dossier along with needs for additional competencies and resources.

The culture team, through the voice of its focal point, also argued that a case could be made for including, under criteria (iii) and (v), the physical attributes of Marsh Arab culture and their associated intangible value as testimonies of a very ancient yet disappearing cultural tradition developed in symbiosis with its natural environment. The staff member from the Ministry of Culture who attended the workshop informed the participants that research allowing to feed the dossier with information on the status of cultural features related to the Marsh Arabs had not yet started; on the other hand, undertaking such a research project on the scale required to produce the high-quality comprehensive information needed for the dossier necessitated human and financial means impossible to mobilize within a limited time. On this basis, the team decided with regret to leave aside this aspect of the property's cultural attributes until enough documentary evidence could be gathered. In the advent that the property was included on the World Heritage List, the State Party could eventually request a revision of its cultural attributes and OUV together with, if necessary, the criteria under which it had been inscribed.

The relevance of presenting the property under criterion (v) was also thoroughly debated during the workshop. The culture team focal point was convinced that only under this criterion could an argument be built to include in a single nomination Mesopotamian sites located in the historical marshes, and the natural attributes of the contemporary Marshlands. By contrast, the nature team feared that this criterion would lead the site to be categorized

as a cultural landscape, and may jeopardize the chances of the property to be inscribed under natural criteria.

2.6 Writing the dossier

After adopting the revised endorsed Tentative List description as the guiding document for the dossier preparation, the two teams embarked on the actual writing of the various sections of the dossier over a period of six months (July to December 2013), followed by a fine-tuning working meeting held in early January 2014. To ensure the efficient coordination of this complicated assignment over the short time allocated, several key decisions were made up-front and agreed upon by the team members:

- The adoption, as the key reference document for the writing process, of the resource manual compiled by IUCN and ICOMOS to provide States Parties with basic principles for the preparation of nomination dossiers;²²
- The development of the detailed structure (outline) of the nomination dossier in accordance with the above guidelines;
- The clear division of writing roles and responsibilities between the team members so as to match their respective specialties and/or writing competences;
- The listing of key technical references and resource persons pertaining to the various sections of the dossier. Written sources were initially identified in the bibliographical reference lists drawn in the natural and cultural background documents;
- Initial writing trials of key sections of the dossier under the direct supervision of mentors;
- The adoption of a detailed action plan and schedule for the various deliverables expected from each team member along with time for mentors to read drafts and provide feedback, and a final deadline for completion of the revisions;
- The adoption of Arabic as the writing language.

The teams were left with a very demanding timetable for the completion of the various sections of the dossier. In addition, all of them had their usual work load, together with personal commitments. Furthermore, they were physically distant from each other even for those who resided in Baghdad, a city where insecurity limited movement, and some either were not familiar with the internet, or did not have network access. As a result, each of them mostly worked individually on their assigned sections although advice and feedback were available from the mentors. It quickly became clear that distance mentoring could replace neither face-to-face guidance nor the synergies created by working as a team over a short period of time fully dedicated to the dossier writing. This is why effective writing progress was made mostly during the four workshops which took place between August 2013 and January 2014 and which are described below (see full list of workshops in the Annex).

When our team started to work, we were faced with lack of time and the size of the output required. Sometime during the workshops the team stayed working all night to make up for the lack of time and to come up with a final product as perfect as we could."

Mudhafar Salim, Head of the natural heritage team

²² UNESCO, 2011.

"In the beginning each team member worked individually to collect information. Then came the most difficult part: connecting and merging all information. We were not qualified to perform this task. The training sessions played a key role in providing us with guidelines, examples from other World Heritage sites, and the advice of Arab and international experts.

Safiya Ismaeel, member of the cultural heritage team

There is a need for rehabilitating the art of writing. How to organize and present specialized information in the nomination file is very different from listing data which is what we are used to doing in reports.

Donya Al-Taweel, natural heritage team member

Maps present a summary of a particular property and are useful tools for decision making. My contribution in preparing maps for the nomination is not just a personal achievement. I am proud to have contributed to a project benefiting my country.

Waleed Khaled, GIS specialist, natural heritage team

In August 2013, the whole nature team, together with two members of the culture team (the focal point and the GIS specialist), convened in Amman to receive training on GIS and map making, and to discuss with mentors the feedback on the first drafts of several sections. At the conclusion of the workshop, the first set of maps for the dossier was completed including a general map of the property together with maps for each component with a superimposition of natural and cultural data whenever relevant. In the weeks following the workshop, all nature team members delivered an advanced draft of their respective sections. The mentor sent his last feedback and requested final drafts by early October so as to allow for an English translation.

In September, the whole culture team met in Baghdad with its mentor to review progress in writing, and to ensure that there was no overlap between information provided for each



The nature team at work, training workshop, Amman, August 2013 © MoEnv

section, and that approaches, information and terminology were consistent throughout. Team members also presented the results of the August field visits they had taken to archaeological sites inside the current marshes, and to the four large Mesopotamian cities of Eridu, Ur, Uruk and Lagash. The state of conservation of these various sites, together with the threats bearing upon them and the protection and conservation capacity of the SBAH were thoroughly discussed. This led to the decision to remove Lagash from the nomination on account of its poor conservation status. The culture team also reiterated its willingness to develop an argument to present the property as a relict cultural landscape under criterion (v). It was agreed that team members would develop this argument in writing but that its inclusion in the dossier would be dependent upon agreement by the nature team and the Steering Committee Head. In early November, the culture team delivered to their mentor a final draft of their respective sections that was then translated into English.

In December, the ARC-WH hosted the two teams for a consolidation workshop running over eight intensive days. Mentors were present together with an enlarged team of advisers, most of whom had been involved as trainers at some stage of the upstream phase, at times as early as 2008. Advisers, with whom the English drafts had been shared beforehand, included regional and international experts in biodiversity, natural heritage, cultural heritage, comparative analysis, and management planning. Both teams worked together with the unified aim to produce one consolidated dossier, including both natural and cultural components, fully integrated into a harmonized document. Collaboration was generally smooth but for the tension generated by the request to include criterion (v) which was successfully negotiated in the end.

Each day of the workshop was dedicated to one section of the dossier, opening with a plenary session where all team members agreed on fundamentals. The teams were then split into small working groups each under the supervision of two advisers and, if necessary, with the assistance of a translator. Each group, comprising members of the nature and culture teams, worked on merging the two parts of the same section. As soon as a section was finalized in Arabic, the mentors introduced the changes in the English text so as to arrive at two consistent language versions of each section by the end of the day. Through this series of intensive sessions, a near final version of the consolidated dossier was achieved. It also appeared that some information and documentation was missing mostly in the non-narrative sections of the dossier, such as lists of institutions or contact information.



Field visit of the nature team to the site of Ur, August 2013 © SBAH



Field visit of the nature team to the site of Uruk, August 2013 © SBAH

The workshop was of critical importance as it was the event when the final touches were made on the core arguments for the property in terms of values, OUV statement, the linkages between the natural and cultural components, the integrity and authenticity statements, as well as the management arrangements. Further, the final maps for the boundaries of the property were produced, incorporating all key attributes and information collated by the two teams during their home-base preparations. The presence of the advisers was instrumental in fine-tuning the document in accordance with World Heritage guidelines and best practices. Experts also provided invaluable contributions on the comparative analysis in addition to the authentication of the various arguments made for the value of the cultural and natural attributes.



The two teams, their mentors and some trainers at the consolidation workshop, ARC-WH, December 2013 © MoEnv

This milestone step was concluded with the production of a semi-final draft of the dossier and a decision by the Steering Committee Head to convene a final round of teamwork before the submission of the dossier to the WHC. This was mostly to allow the culture team to integrate a final set of information relating to criterion (v) and harmonize their information with those pertaining to the natural components.



Consolidation workshop, ARC-WH, December 2013
© MoEnv

Because the project had run out of budget, the final workshop was held at the UNESCO Iraq Office in Amman in early January 2014 with participants' costs covered by the MoEnv and MoTA. Attendance was limited to two members of each team (including the focal points who could work in English) in addition to one of the GIS specialists to ensure that final adjustments to the boundaries could be made. Under the guidance of two mentors, team members worked directly on the English text over three long and intensive days. They performed a staggering amount

of work to double check that each section was complete and the whole text was consistent and not redundant. They also performed a last terminology check, harmonized the spelling and transcription of Arabic words, and standardized bibliographical references. It is only at this stage that the final name of the property was adopted as "The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities". Finally, a number of photographs for which copyrights were easy to obtain were selected to illustrate the dossier.

In the following week, the mentors performed a final round of proofreading, and the focal points finalized the layout of the text, tables, maps and photos. The Steering Committee Chair reviewed the final product and gave his go-ahead for printing. On 23 January, a signature ceremony was subsequently held in Baghdad in which the Minister of Environment and Minister of Tourism and Antiquities officially endorsed the dossier after reading its Arabic version. It was then time to make logistical arrangements to submit the document to the WHC a few days ahead of the 31 January deadline. The dossier was later accepted as completed.



Sketching the boundaries of the property, training workshop, ARC-WH, June 2013 © Geraldine Chatelard.



Finalization workshop, Amman, January 2014 © MoEnv



Signature ceremony of the nomination dossier by the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Tourism and Antiquities © MoEnv

BOX 6 - Main steps leading to the completion of the nomination dossier

The following is a summary of the main steps leading to the successful completion of the nomination dossier of The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities in the hope that it can be of use to other States Parties and organizations of the World Heritage system willing to engage in a similar experiment:

1. Establishment of a strategic partnership between a national institution (MoEnv) and international organizations (UNEP and UNESCO) on the basis of a shared vision for the conservation of a heritage site with a potential OUV;
2. Through this partnership, mobilization of international funding (IMELS) for the nomination preparation;
3. Efforts to raise the awareness of the country's political decision makers about the World Heritage Convention to ensure their support and buy-in for the nomination (by exposing them to the benefits of nomination through a study tour to a comparable property, and inviting them to participate in World Heritage Committee meetings and training workshops);
4. Setting up a national umbrella for the nomination preparation (National Steering Committee);
5. Feasibility study conducted by IUCN of the proposed property based on up-to-date science;
6. On the basis of the study results, development by specialized organizations (IUCN-ROWA, WHC, UNESCO Iraq, ARC-WH) of a training and capacity-building programme, and preparation of background studies on the cultural values of the proposed property;
7. Setting of a flexible deadline for the completion of the dossier;
8. Adoption of Arabic as the main language for the training and capacity-building programme, and translation of key documents into that language;
9. Appointment of natural and cultural heritage preparation teams for the nomination dossier composed of members with relevant technical knowledge and accountable to the Steering Committee;
10. Implementation of the training and capacity-building programme with the involvement of regional and international experts covering all main aspects of the World Heritage Convention, nomination process, dossier preparation (with special emphasis on the comparative analysis), management planning for the World Heritage site, the collection of documentation, GIS and the development of maps, *etc.*;
11. Adoption of a mentoring system to guide both teams during the writing process, and of a two-track preparation schedule and coordination mechanism between teams;
12. As part of the mentoring programme, revision and expansion of the description of the proposed property on the Tentative List; review of this description by IUCN and ICOMOS, endorsement by the Steering Committee, and use of

- the document as a blueprint for the nomination dossier;
13. Organization of a series of parallel writing workshops for the two teams, and of joint consolidation and harmonization workshops;
 14. Endorsement of the final nomination dossier by the relevant national authorities (MoEnv and MoTA).

2.7 A collaborative learning process

The last six months of the dossier preparation were particularly intense for all those involved in this highly complex task – team members, mentors and trainers alike – who experienced a steep learning curve. There were many challenges and much worry along the way, particularly due to the fact that the natural and cultural tracks did not move at the same pace. When merging the two tracks, the wheels had to be oiled to reconcile different perspectives and approaches to the property. Adaptive learning was key to the success of the exercise, together with working against a deadline which provided a sense of urgency and creative tension. Finalizing and submitting a complete nomination dossier was made possible thanks to the right combination between, first, the strategic oversight and vision-driven thrust of the Steering Committee Chair, second, preparation teams composed of hard-working, fast-learning and competent professionals, and, lastly, sound and timely advice provided by a group of committed and capable international and regional mentors, trainers and advisers.

The exercise provided for exciting learning-by-doing in which all those involved – from team members to trainers, mentors and the Steering Committee Chair – were engaged in investigating new domains of knowledge with the practical goal not just of finalizing a nomination but, most importantly, of producing a set of documents bolstering advocacy efforts in favour of improved conservation measures for the property. Specifically, the knowledge gained and put to use throughout the project covered the following areas:

- The 1972 Convention and its concepts about which Karim Hendili, culture programme specialist at the WHC, rightfully remarked that mastering them is “like learning a new language”;
- The Convention’s implementation mechanisms, and the architecture and role of the World Heritage system;
- Geology, hydrology, biology, ecology, archaeology, epigraphy, history and anthropology which were combined to identify the property’s attributes and values;
- Iraq’s governance regimes on natural and cultural heritage, economic and natural resources – specifically water, agriculture and oil – and local development;
- The position, weight and role of international actors in relation to these regimes in a context of post-conflict reconstruction and unstable political governance;
- State-of-the-art conservation and management requirements and methodologies for natural and cultural World Heritage.

None of these domains of knowledge was tackled through theoretical studies. Rather, information was incrementally imparted to the participants through a learning process associated with the nomination preparation. This took place by looking successively at knowledge gaps about the property, its attributes, possible World Heritage criteria, issues of authenticity and integrity, management arrangements, and the particularly challenging

comparative analysis which forced all team members to look well beyond the usual scale against which they were used to measuring the value of their country's natural and cultural heritage.

UNEP was further able to support the small number of team members who had the necessary linguistic abilities to attend training courses on the management and conservation of World Heritage sites organized by UNITAR in Japan. Four team members in total, two from each team, attended these courses in the Spring of 2012 and 2013, respectively dedicated to the justification of OUV and the comparative analysis. This experience broadened the trainees' international exposure by allowing them to share experience with other countries engaged in preparing nomination dossiers, and increased their awareness of the length and complexity of the process. Upon returning home, they were also able to present to other team members the results of the exercises they had performed on the Marshlands as a case study, and to take up a training role towards their peers.

Another benefit of collaborative learning was a fruitful exchange of knowledge between natural and cultural specialists: besides being exposed to state-of-the-art approaches in their own disciplines, members of the culture team became acquainted with the environmental context of the Marshlands, while members of the nature team discovered the richness of the Marshlands' interactions with human cultures.

Finally, besides broadening their knowledge-base, team members improved their communication and inter-personal skills, English language skills, creativity and problem-solving abilities, and writing capacities. Because everybody had something to contribute and learn at one and the same time, there was little hierarchy between members of the nature and culture teams, although some members were considerably more senior than others. The project was therefore truly collaborative.



The Lower Mesopotamian Marshes © Mudhafar Salim

CONCLUSION

A national achievement

In its early stages, the preparation of the mixed serial nomination dossier faced numerous challenges relating mainly to the following issues:

- Institutional set-up – There were unclear and at times conflicting authorities over both cultural and natural heritage, a complicated relationship and little coordination between line ministries, and no established national governance system for World Heritage.
- Technical capacity – The members of the national teams appointed to prepare the nomination dossier had no knowledge of World Heritage issues. Furthermore, access to specialized knowledge on various aspects of the property was impeded by lack of updated data, and/or the limited linguistic abilities of team members.
- Confidence – Due to a legacy of mutual suspicion between the UN and the Government of Iraq, pressures on the latter to adopt international standards and norms have been a sensitive issue.
- Funding – Despite the generous allocation provided by the IMELS to support the preparation of the nomination dossier and management framework, funding was irregular and meant that the capacity-building schedule had to be readjusted several times.
- Security – Lack of security in the country affected field-based data gathering to fill knowledge gaps about the property, prevented the development of a participative management plan, made it impossible for the mentors and trainers to gain first-hand experience of the property, and finally imposed upon international organizations the adoption of a remote implementation method which meant a limited capacity to follow up on teams' progress outside of workshops and additional costs to organize workshops outside Iraq.

Yet after several years of hard work and dedication on the part of all parties involved, the nomination preparation resulted in a long series of direct and indirect results, particularly:

- A fully-fledged nomination dossier for a mixed serial property, the first of its kind in the Arab region;
- National political and popular support for the nomination;
- An enhanced awareness about the World Heritage Convention among Iraqi decision makers, natural and cultural heritage professionals in government and civil society, and a large section of the Iraqi public, thanks to the publicity given to the nomination since the inception of the process;
- Effective inter-ministerial collaboration in the management of the proposed property through a National Steering Committee;
- The demonstration that international conventions are of relevance to meet national goals in matters of heritage conservation, and the inclusion of the World Heritage Convention and other conventions (Ramsar, CBD, *etc.*) in sectoral strategies including plans to revise relevant legislation;
- Reforms in the national World Heritage governance system which now rests on functional World Heritage units established or reinforced inside the MoTA and MoEnv, and on a National Committee for World Heritage;
- The training of a new cadre of young and senior professionals to staff World Heritage units, support provincial staff on management issues, prepare new nomination dossiers, and spread awareness about the Convention in various sectors;

- The designation and establishment of Iraq's first national park in the Central Marshes (one of the components of the nominated property) alongside the development of a management framework for all the components of the property on the basis of World Heritage requirements;
- An enhancement of the profile of the archaeological sites included in the nomination, resulting in the allocation of provincial funds for conservation projects, and new agreements between MoTA and international archaeological teams to conduct on-site research;
- The mobilization of national, local and international stakeholders now ready to engage in the development of a participatory management plan for the whole property on the basis of the management framework included in the dossier;
- Increased confidence and levels of communication between the national institutions and international organizations involved;
- The advancement of the upstream process at the national and regional levels, qualifying Iraq to be a regional centre of knowledge and good practice related to nationally-led nomination dossier preparation;
- The repositioning of Iraq in the international conservation arena.

On the basis of the above achievements, it can be safely said that, in and of itself, the process leading to the completion and submission of the nomination dossier of The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities was a national achievement for a country facing tremendous development, humanitarian and security challenges and aspiring for a better future for its people and heritage. The immediate result is that, regardless of the decision of the World Heritage Committee about the nominated property, there is little doubt that Iraq today is more ready than ever to implement the World Heritage Convention.

The future of the natural heritage team is one of my concerns. At the MoEnv, we have created a centre for biological diversity that hosts a World Heritage unit, now staffed with the people who worked on the nomination dossier. Their next task will be to draw a list of natural sites to place on the Tentative List of Iraq.

Ali Al-Lami, Head of the National Steering Committee for the World Heritage Nomination and Management of the Marshlands

After this extensive capacity-building exercise, we feel very confident in our ability to lead nomination processes for other natural sites in our country. We now can offer a lot of know-how on World Heritage nominations to our colleagues all over Iraq.

Ali Haloob and Shayma' Kareem, members of the natural heritage team

Now we have a national team with trained members and a high degree of coordination between ministries and other authorities. The experience boosted our confidence to prepare future nomination dossiers and advise other teams working on nominations.

Ayad Kadhum, Head of the cultural heritage team

The best professional achievement for me is that following my involvement in the nomination preparation, I was appointed to the World Heritage unit in the MoTA. As the youngest member of the team, I am very proud of this.

Safiya Ismaeel, member of the cultural heritage team

Perhaps the more important thing that I have learned is the benefit of working as a multidisciplinary team. I owe a lot to other team members and trainers for a fruitful exchange of knowledge, and opening me up to new developments in various scientific fields. I am planning to adopt this approach with young colleagues at the Natural History Museum for our protected area projects.

Mohamed Al-Sudani, natural heritage team member

As a geologist, I became aware that criterion (viii) in the World Heritage Convention is dedicated to outstanding geological processes and geomorphic features. We have several important geological sites in Iraq that are in need of protection and I now would like to raise their national profile and conservation status by explaining that they could be nominated for World Heritage.

Aqeel Al-Zubaidi, natural heritage team member

Lessons Learned

Before the experience of the nomination of The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities, no nomination process in the Arab region had turned into a major national capacity-building and knowledge development programme incorporating in a systematic way regional expertise and international advice and guidance to a national team. The authors of this case study share the view that this example could form part of the best practice guidelines both for the WHCBS and the upstream process for which a systematization of the role of the Advisory Bodies and other World Heritage actors, such as the WHC, is still in its early development stage. Lessons learned in the context of the experience described in this report can be summarized as follows:

1. The pedagogical methodology for providing upstream advisory support and guidance to States Parties engaged in nominating a property for World Heritage inscription is still experimental, and based on a learning-by-doing approach that will necessarily be adapted to each context. On the basis of the experience described in this report, the following advice can be offered for similar undertakings:

- The upstream guidance is best supported by such strategic tools as the Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention, World Heritage thematic studies prepared by the Advisory Bodies, dossier preparation manuals, and other official World Heritage documents;
- There is clearly added value in involving in the process a regional Category 2 centre dedicated to World Heritage. As part of its mandate and under the WHCBS, such a partner can help identify and mobilize supporting regional experts, offer the necessary logistical and financial assistance for meetings and workshops, and provide a learning environment adjusted to local linguistic and cultural specificities;
- In the case of a mixed nomination, it would be appropriate that both IUCN and ICOMOS engage with the upstream process in a coordinated manner to ensure an equivalent level of technical and capacity development input for the natural and cultural components of a nomination.

We are keen on taking part in the development of qualified World Heritage professionals in Iraq. The ARC-WH hosted a number of workshops at our premises which enabled the national teams to interact with international experts. We made sure that language was not a barrier, including financing the translation and printing of the IUCN screening study on the natural attributes of the site. This falls within the main functions of our Category 2 Centre,

which is to provide information in Arabic so as to ensure that a wider regional audience is reached by the valuable publications produced by UNESCO and its Advisory Bodies.

Khalifa Al Khalifa, Assistant Director, ARC-WH

2. The scope of involvement of different organizations of the World Heritage system in the upstream process varies according to internal policies. At times, however, their involvement carries the potential for a conflict of roles and interests. This is particularly the case for the Advisory Bodies and the WHC. This is why:

- The upstream process should be conceived and presented as a mere technical tool – amongst other technical, institutional and policy tools – supporting States Parties in implementing the World Heritage Convention;
- Each organization should clearly define the scope of their involvement in the process, prepare guidelines for experts involved, and make this scope known to the State Party and other partners early on;
- The roles of experts evaluating nomination dossiers on behalf of the Advisory Bodies and that of advisers and trainers in the framework of the upstream process need to be clearly separated and allocated to different people. One way of ensuring the necessary level of transparency is to include in the nomination dossier the names of all experts involved at one stage or another in providing advice and guidance.

Training workshops are the best method to develop the capacities of national staff working on the preparation of nomination dossiers. When contributing to this kind of workshop, we as World Heritage Centre staff have the obligation to stick to technical advice in the sense that we do not give our personal opinion on the potential value of the proposed property or on any other aspect of the nomination process.

Karim Hendili, Culture Programme Specialist, World Heritage Centre

Many participants in the World Heritage Convention find the reactive nature of its nomination and monitoring processes unhelpful. The upstream process should allow IUCN to provide advice and support on World Heritage nominations at the earliest possible opportunity, before a full nomination document is prepared. In detail this can involve considering which sites are appropriate to add to a country's Tentative List, and to undertake feasibility studies on Tentative List sites before the political and financial support necessary for a nomination is committed.

Tim Badman, Director, IUCN World Heritage Programme

3. The positive relations established between the organizations involved in the upstream process and the State Party may deteriorate if a nomination is evaluated negatively by the Advisory Bodies and/or if the decision by the World Heritage Committee is not to inscribe the proposed property or even to defer or refer the nomination. This is why:

- Organizations involved in the upstream process should ensure that they carefully manage a State Party's expectations. In particular, they should refrain from any commitment or indication that their involvement will increase the chances of a nominated property being inscribed on the World Heritage List. Rather, they should keep alerting the State Party of the scope of the task ahead, the stringency of World Heritage requirements, and the independence of the evaluation process;
- They should clearly state that their advice is not prescriptive. Whatever the decision a State Party makes regarding their advice, the State Party remains fully responsible for developing the content of a nomination dossier and for the final product;

- Involved organizations should keep reminding the State Party that the ultimate focus of a nomination is to enhance the conservation of a property, and that neither referral nor deferral of a nomination should be taken as rebukes but as opportunities to improve the dossier and the property's conservation.

The Marshlands dossier was the first time IUCN was involved in the upstream process, so we went through a lot of improvisation. We were also very careful as we were walking a fine line: we gave advice and recommendations, but not instructions. Even if we are not sure that the property has an OUV, it is a well known site of global importance, and our aim was to use the World Heritage Convention as a tool to enhance its conservation status. Using the upstream process for conservation purposes is an approach we are trying to replicate elsewhere.

Haifaa Abdulhalim, Coordinator of IUCN's TABE'A World Heritage Programme for the Arab Region and West Asia

I was never involved in a similar exercise before I prepare the screening study on potential World Heritage nomination for the Marshlands and delivered several training sessions to the nature team. However I am now working in Georgia on a similar upstream process using the experience gained with the Marshlands dossier.

Tobias Garstecki, biodiversity expert and trainer of the natural heritage team



Reeds of the Marshlands © ARC- WH

Where do we go from here?

The proposed property proved to be a very complex site from the cultural, environmental and social perspectives. Besides being nominated as a serial, mixed site, the property faces several integrity and authenticity issues related to natural resource exploitation, water quality deterioration, cross-border sensitivities, cultural heritage degradation, and limited long-term capacity for effective governance and adequate management. The Government of Iraq, supported by concerned international organizations, is now eager to use the momentum created by the submission of the nomination to address these challenges. Thanks to additional funding provided by the IMELS, follow-up activities will be undertaken to support the natural and cultural management of the nominated property. Emphasis is on a fully fledged consultation process with national and local stakeholders to refine the management planning arrangements prepared as part of the nomination dossier. The second objective is to develop the capacity of government staff in the provinces to implement the management plan. Further, it is expected that this opportunity will facilitate access to the national budgetary allocations necessary for the long-term conservation of the natural and cultural values of the property regardless of its inscription on the World Heritage List.

We learned approaches to the management, conservation and monitoring of archaeological sites different from the ones which we thought were correct. These principles apply primarily to World Heritage sites, but they are important for other sites too. We also understood that dealing with the local populations within the sites is an essential element of site management.

Qahtan Al-Abeed, Focal Point of the cultural heritage team

Finalizing the nomination dossier was not the outcome. It was only the start of a much more complex set of tasks. We now all realize that the next steps require a lot of work in common between government institutions, coordination between different sectors, in addition to the crucial role of local communities.

Mudhafar Salim, Head of the natural heritage team

The project was a vehicle to enhance the technical and institutional capacity of Iraqi counterparts and to plan the management of the Iraqi Marshlands in line with the World Heritage Operational Guidelines. When it comes to site management, the project started from scratch, then supported Iraqis to decide which values of the Marshlands should be protected, to assess their current status, and to identify the actions to be taken. The upcoming evaluation mission by the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee will not only assess the presence of OUV, they will also study the appropriateness of the management system. This outcome of the project intervention should be seen as an opportunity.

Ryuichi Fukuhara, Project Manager, UNEP-DTIE-IETC

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Al Madheif (guest house made of reeds) © IUCN



Central Marshes (Jshabeish) © Haifaa Abdulhalim, IUCN



ANNEX: Training and mentoring workshops of relevance to the upstream process (2008-2014)

9-12 June 2008 Erbil, Iraq	Organizer(s)
<p>The natural World Heritage and biodiversity: towards sustainable development in future Iraq</p> <p>Content: Biodiversity and natural heritage conservation and management; International conventions with a focus on the CBD and World Heritage Convention and linkages between them</p> <p>Participants:</p> <p>Main Outcome(s): Iraq joined the CBD in 2009</p>	UNESCO Iraq science sector and IUCN-WESCANIA
25-29 June 2009 Amman, Jordan	Organizer(s)
<p>Kick-off meeting and first induction training for the project "Natural and cultural management of the Iraqi Marshlands as World Heritage"</p> <p>Content: Presentation of the project to elicit input and advice from Iraqi and international stakeholders on the proposed activities; Presentation of existing initiatives for Marshlands restoration; Presentation of main concepts and mechanisms of the World Heritage Convention.</p> <p>Participants: Senior Iraqi officials from the State Ministry of Marshlands, MoEnv, MoC, Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation, Governorate Councils of Maysan, Dhi Qar and Basra provinces; Representatives from the governments of Japan and Italy, and of CIDA, FAO and UNDP.</p> <p>Main Outcome(s): Establishment of a National Steering Committee for the management of the Iraqi Marshlands as World Heritage (Steering Committee)</p>	UNESCO Iraq and UNEP-DTIE-IETC



First induction training workshop, Amman, June 2009 © UNESCO



Kick-off meeting, Amman, June 2009 © UNESCO

2-3 July 2010 Istanbul, Turkey	Organizer(s)
<p>Second induction training for the project “Natural and cultural management of the Iraqi Marshlands as World Heritage”</p> <p>Content: World Heritage concepts and requirements with a focus on management, following a study tour to the Danube Delta</p> <p>Participants: Members of the Steering Committee</p> <p>Main Outcome(s): Project shifted towards preparation of a nomination dossier; Decision to establish technical team of environmental and cultural experts to receive relevant training and undertake dossier preparation; Strengthening of coordination mechanisms among relevant authorities to address factors such as drought and oil development.</p>	<p>UNESCO Iraq, UNEP-DTIE-IETC and IUCN</p>
2-6 October 2011 Sulaymaniyah, Iraq	Organizer(s)
<p>Protected areas management plan preparation and implementation I</p> <p>Content: Introduction to the concept of protected areas and their management approaches; Overview of protected areas and international conventions (Ramsar and World Heritage).</p> <p>Participants: Members of National Protected Area Committee and Marshlands nomination National Steering Committee, NGO staff, academics in the fields of environment, education, antiquities and planning</p> <p>Main Outcome(s): First step towards training of qualified experts capable of preparing management plans for protected areas based on international standards</p>	<p>IUCN-ROWA</p>

12–16 February 2012 Amman, Jordan	Organizer(s)
<p>Protected areas management plan preparation and implementation II</p> <p>Content: Management planning for natural World Heritage sites; Process of development of a management planning framework for ecosystem management and biodiversity conservation in the Iraqi Marshlands.</p> <p>Participants: Full Iraqi natural heritage team nominated to prepare the Marshlands dossier</p> <p>Main Outcome(s): Nature team trained on World Heritage management planning and able to prepare management framework for the Marshlands.</p>	IUCN-ROWA
18–19 February 2012 Amman, Jordan	Organizer(s)
<p>First training workshop for the preparation of the Marshlands nomination dossier (inception workshop)</p> <p>Content: Advanced introduction to World Heritage fundamentals (OUV, integrity and authenticity, cultural and natural criteria, categories of sites, delineation of boundaries and buffer zones); Challenges inherent to mixed nominations in terms of dossier preparation and management requirements; Identification of research gaps, discussion on the methods to fill them; Discussion of the presentation of the property on Iraq's Tentative List; Geographical extent and design of the proposed property.</p> <p>Participants: Full natural and cultural heritage preparation teams</p> <p>Main Outcome(s): Capacity building and mentoring methodology agreed upon; Recommendation to restructure preparation teams around core and extended teams, review description of property on the Tentative List, and consider inclusion of several component parts in the property (serial nomination).</p>	UNESCO Iraq

4-8 June 2012 Hiroshima, Japan	Organizer(s)
<p>Management and conservation of World Heritage sites</p> <p>Fundamentals of World Heritage management and conservation; Focus on justification of OUV.</p> <p>Participants: Three members of the extended preparation teams (one cultural, two natural)</p> <p>Main Outcome(s): Broadened international exposure of team members; Sharing of experience with other States Parties engaged in preparing nominations; Increased awareness of the length and complexity of the process.</p>	UNITAR
6-7 December 2012 Manama, Bahrain	Organizer(s)
<p>Second training workshop for the preparation of the Marshlands nomination dossier</p> <p>Progress update; Group work on cultural attributes and criteria; Approaches to serial and mixed nominations; Integrity and authenticity requirements.</p> <p>Participants: Three members of the nature team, one member of the culture team, one staff member from the Iraqi MoC</p> <p>Main Outcome(s): Decision to focus on cultural criterion (iii) but leave aside criterion (v); Decision to focus on the historical value of the property and not its anthropological value as part of a cultural landscape; Decision to enlarge scope of the property to include the historical marshes.</p>	UNESCO Iraq, WHC and ARC-WH

22-26 April 2013 Hiroshima, Japan	Organizer(s)
Management and conservation of World Heritage sites Fundamentals of World Heritage management and conservation; Focus on serial nominations and comparative analysis. Participants: One member of the nature team and two members of the culture team Main Outcome(s): Progress on the comparative analysis after Marshlands was used as a case study during the workshop; One participant awarded certificate as trainer for World Heritage nomination preparation.	UNITAR
3-6 June 2013 Manama, Bahrain	Organizer(s)
IUCN Red Listing Assessment How to develop a Red Listing assessment for the Marshlands. Participants: Selected members of nature team Main Outcome(s): A Red List assessment was developed to be included in the nomination dossier	IUCN-ROWA and ARC-WH
8-10 June 2013 Manama, Bahrain	Organizer(s)
Third training workshop for the preparation of the Marshlands nomination dossier Revision of the description of the site on the Tentative List Participants: Members of the nature team Main Outcome(s): Sections of the description dealing with natural attributes and values thoroughly revised; Writing tasks distributed among team members and workplan updated.	UNESCO Iraq and ARC-WH

16-20 June 2013 Amman, Jordan	Organizer(s)
<p>Fourth training workshop for the preparation of the Marshlands nomination dossier</p> <p>Content: Revision of the description of the site on the Tentative List; Introduction to the principles and methodology of the comparative analysis and cultural management framework development.</p> <p>Participants: Members of the culture team</p> <p>Main Outcome(s): Sections of the description dealing with cultural attributes and values thoroughly revised and merged with sections dealing with natural attributes and values; Writing tasks distributed among team members and work plan updated.</p>	UNESCO Iraq
18-22 August 2013 Amman, Jordan	Organizer(s)
<p>Fifth training workshop for the preparation of the Marshlands nomination dossier</p> <p>GIS and map making; Discussion with mentors on first draft of sections.</p> <p>Participants: Nature team, focal point of the culture team, GIS specialists from both teams</p> <p>Main Outcome: First set of maps completed</p>	IUCN-ROWA and UNESCO Iraq
21-22 September 2013 Baghdad, Iraq	Organizer(s)
<p>Sixth training workshop for the preparation of the Marshlands nomination dossier</p> <p>Content: Review of culture team's progress, and discussion of outcomes of field visit to archaeological sites</p> <p>Participants: Culture team</p> <p>Main Outcomes: Decision to remove one archaeological site from nomination on account of poor conservation status; Insistence by team to develop an argument to present the property as a relict cultural landscape under criterion (v).</p>	UNESCO Iraq and MoTA

10–17 December 2013 Manama, Bahrain	Organizer(s)
<p>Consolidation workshop for the Marshlands nomination dossier</p> <p>Integration of texts and maps for the natural and cultural components of the property.</p> <p>Participants: Nature and culture preparation teams</p> <p>Main Outcome: Incorporation of criterion (v); Near final version of consolidated dossier; Identification of missing information in the non-narrative sections of the dossier.</p>	UNESCO Iraq, IUCN-ROWA, ARC-WH
10–12 January 2014 Amman, Jordan	Organizer(s)
<p>Finalization workshop for the Marshlands nomination dossier</p> <p>Incorporation of final information related to criterion (v); Completion and consistency check; Harmonization of terminology, spelling, and transcription of Arabic words; Standardization of bibliographical references; Final selection of photos.</p> <p>Participants: Two members of each team in addition to the two GIS specialists</p> <p>Main Outcome: Final text and maps completed and adoption of final name of the property</p>	UNESCO Iraq, MoEnv and MoTA

