

**Framework Convention
for the Protection of the Marine
Environment of the Caspian Sea**

Distr.: General
18 October 2010

Original: English

Conference of the Parties
Third Meeting
10-12 August 2011, Aktau

Items 3 and 15 of the provisional agenda

**STRATEGY FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE PROTECTION OF THE
MARINE ENVIRONMENT OF THE CASPIAN SEA
(PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY)**

Note by the interim Secretariat

Introduction

1. The Strategy for Civil Society Engagement in the Caspian Sea Marine Environment or Public Participation Strategy (PPS) is the product of a lengthy regional consultative process which began under the auspices of the Caspian Environment Programme with the formulation of the Caspian Stakeholders Analysis (2002, revised 2004), and continued with the formulation and approval of the Caspian Public Participation Strategy (2006/07).
2. A draft strategy was presented to a regional meeting of the representatives of the civil society in May 2009 in St Petersburg. The strategy was placed on the website of the Caspian Environment Programme (CEP) and of the interim Secretariat of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention) for comments by interested stakeholders. The final version incorporates all comments from interested stakeholders.
3. The PPS was finalized with the assistance of the CaspEco project and discussed and agreed upon at the meeting of the Senior Officials on Procedural and Institutional Issues, Geneva, 25-29 May 2010.
4. The Strategy for Civil Society Engagement in the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea will be translated into National Strategies as part of the National Convention Action Plans.

Suggested Action:

5. The Conference of the Parties may wish to:
 - a) welcome the Strategy for Civil Society Engagement in the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea, as well as its translation into National Strategies;
 - b) confirm the intention of the Caspian Governments to ensure that the conditions for stakeholders engagement are met, through an early endorsement, launching and implementation of the Strategy, as part of the National Convention Action Plans.

**STRATEGY FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN THE CASPIAN SEA
MARINE ENVIRONMENT
(PUBLIC PARTICIPATION STRATEGY)**

Contents

Introduction

Objectives of the Public Participation Strategy

Key terms

Access to information, capacity building and institutional development

Annexes

1. List of Abbreviations
2. SCAP public participation activities
3. "CASPECO" PP activities

Introduction

1. The Caspian Sea is the largest inland closed water body in the world. Between Europe and Asia, the Caspian's transboundary waters are shared by five littoral States: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, IR-Iran, Russian Federation and Turkmenistan.

2. The Caspian Sea is unique in its hydrographical and ecological characteristics. Nevertheless, for a long time the natural resources of the Caspian Sea have been extensively used and exploited without properly considering the environmental and social impacts of economic decisions. During the last decades pollution exceeded the environmental capacity of the Caspian Sea. Apart from that, many of the environmental problems of the Caspian Sea are related to the sea level fluctuation and to the extensive use of water from inflowing rivers.

3. The pollution of the Caspian Sea derives from various sources as a result of human activities, including the discharge, emission and disposal of harmful and hazardous substances, wastes and other pollutants, flowing into the Sea from land-based sources and transported through the atmosphere. A significant threat to the conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity of the Caspian Sea is the continuing increase of activities of oil and gas companies in the development of hydrocarbons.

4. In this situation effective steps to address the above-mentioned environmental concerns must be taken, including the implementation of effective environmental management in general and of water resources in particular.

5. One of these activities should be to raise awareness of the public and decision-makers about the ecological values of the Caspian Sea and the need to preserve its biodiversity and unique ecosystems.

6. Public involvement in the formulation and adoption of decisions relating to the use and management of water resources are of great importance: the state of natural resources, especially water resources, is important for people, since their economic well-being and health depends on it. In addition, every citizen has the right to a healthy environment, which means that every citizen must also worry about its preservation. The rights of the public and particularly of affected stakeholders, to participate in decision-making processes have now been widely acknowledged by national and international law.

7. In recognition of both the requirements and the potential benefits of enhanced public participation in solving the challenges facing the environment of the Caspian Sea, this strategy for public participation in the Caspian Sea marine environment has been developed. Organizing this work in all littoral countries is of principal importance.

Objectives of the Public Participation Strategy

8. The main objectives of the Public Participation Strategy (PPS) are the following:

(a) to promote the establishment of effective mechanisms for public participation and engagement in the environmental issues of the Caspian Sea in general, and in issues relating to the Tehran Convention, its Protocols and the Strategic Convention Action Program in particular; and

(b) to assist the public to be informed and to participate in decision-making processes, in the planning/development and determination of directions for activities as well as in the implementation and monitoring of activities undertaken under the Tehran Convention.

9. The objectives of the PPS can be achieved through capacity building and strengthening of existing institutions as well as by building new formal and informal institutions for public participation in environmental management of the Caspian Sea. The strategy should be a tool to be used for sound participation of the stakeholders of the Caspian Sea countries within the Teheran Convention process.

10. With regard to public access to information Article 21, paragraph 2 of the Tehran Convention states: “The Contracting Parties shall endeavour to ensure public access to environmental conditions of the Caspian Sea, measures taken or planned to be taken to prevent, control and reduce pollution of the Caspian Sea in accordance with their national legislation and taking into account provisions of existing international agreements concerning public access to environmental information.”

11. The Strategic Convention Action Programme (SCAP) is a comprehensive, long-term agenda and framework for the implementation of the Tehran Convention and its Protocols over a period of 10 years that shall be translated and implemented through National Action Programmes supported by the biennial Programmes of Work of the Convention Secretariat.

12. The objective of the SCAP is to implement the provisions of the Tehran Convention and its Protocols upon their entry into force for the medium-term perspective in the area of the protection of the Caspian Sea from all sources of pollution as well as the protection, preservation, restoration and sustainable and rational use of the biological resources of the Caspian Sea by means of defining the main directions for the activities of the Contracting Parties under the Tehran Convention and future protocols upon their entry into force.

13. Pursuant to Article 5 of the Convention, the following principles shall guide the actions to achieve the objective of the SCAP and to implement its provisions:

(a) the precautionary principle, by virtue of which, where there is a threat of serious or irreversible damage to the Caspian Sea environment, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent such damage;

(b) “the polluter pays” principle, by virtue of which the polluter bears the costs of the pollution, including its prevention, control and reduction;

(c) the principle of accessibility of information on the pollution of the marine environment of the Caspian Sea according to which the Contracting Parties provide each other with relevant information to the maximum possible extent.

14. The SCAP stipulates that “the principle of public participation and transparency shall be applied, such that all stakeholders, including communities, individuals and concerned organizations shall be given the opportunity to participate, at the appropriate level, in decision-making and management processes that affect the Caspian Sea. This includes providing access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities and effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings to engage all stakeholders to exercise their rights effectively. Public authorities shall widely disseminate information on the work proposed and undertaken to protect and rehabilitate the Caspian Sea.”

15. This Public Participation Strategy builds on the previous developed strategy but has now been further aligned with the Tehran Convention and its requirements. The first Caspian Public Participation Strategy prepared by the UNDP/GEF Caspian Environmental Program was designed and formulated in consultation with different stakeholders at the local, national and regional level. After initial consultations, broad guidelines of the draft of the previous Caspian PPS were prepared based on a background analysis and a Stakeholder Analysis Reports of 2002 (SHA) and its revisited document of

2004 (SAR). The first regional stakeholder meeting was held in Baku in 2006 and participants from the five littoral states brainstormed on the needs and modalities of public participation for the Caspian Sea at the various levels. The draft PPS, drawn on the basis of these consultations, was once again shared at the local, national and regional levels for comments before adoption.

16. The PPS should serve as a broad and flexible framework with the aim to build systems for public participation in the process of rehabilitation and protection of the Caspian Sea environment. It could be adopted by different stakeholders such as Governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), special interest groups, non-organized individuals, and the private sector. The PPS should also serve as guidelines consisting of guiding principles which can be followed for every concerned activity as part of the ecosystem approach regardless of the type of activities implemented.

17. On the basis of the PPS operational plans for activities at the various levels (local, national and regional) can be developed together with monitoring and evaluation indicators. The Strategy will also ensure the sharing of practices and information on legal and operational barriers for participation in each country.

Key terms

18. The Caspian PPS refers to “*civil society*” as the association of free, sovereign individuals vested with extensive civil, political, socio-economic and cultural rights and concerned by the state of the environment of the Caspian Sea.

19. “*The public*” means one or more natural or legal persons.

20. “*Public participation*” is an ongoing process which can improve public participation and monitoring activities, awareness, communication, interaction and joint decision making among different stakeholders and the public. Public participation includes both outreach (awareness-raising) and inputs (participation, consultation, monitoring and collaboration). Through public participation, all parties become better informed about the range of views on proposals and issues. A good public participation process will not only result in better decisions that are more sensitive and responsive to public concerns and values, but ensure satisfactory final results and sustainability. A good public participation mechanism is also one that ensures participation in any process affecting the public’s interests. The public has a strong sense of investment in the process and an interest in influencing its outcome through inputs for the identification of environmental problems and concerns, through providing education on these problems and concerns, through giving support to understand and apply mechanisms of problem solving. To this end, the public has an active interest in those mechanisms reaching its full potential.

21. The Caspian PPS refers to a “*stakeholder*” as any legal or natural person, group or institution, regardless of the place of residence, which has an interest in the Caspian Sea, has influence in its programmes and decision-making processes, and is affected directly or indirectly by decision-making processes. The Stakeholder Analysis conducted by the CEP studied the opinions and attitudes of stakeholders towards priority areas. However, the Public Participation Strategy is more of a methodology that encourages the public to identify environmental issues and concerns as well as ways to contribute in solving them.

22. The three main levels of public participation envisaged in the Public Participation Strategy are:

- (a) Information: This is the foundation of public participation and engagement, in which decision-makers actively disseminate information or stakeholders (including the general public) access

information based upon their demand. This is also the main component of participation and thus forms the focus of this Public Participation Strategy which calls for developing a proper system of access to information for various stakeholder groups in relation to the Tehran Convention and its Protocols.

(b) Consultation: This is the middle level of public participation if we consider the supply of information as the foundation. Decision-makers make documents available for written comments, organize a public hearing or actively seek comments, proposals and opinions of the public through for instance surveys and interviews. They ask for and receive stakeholders' feedback on planned or proposed decisions and take due account of those permissible comments prior to taking decisions.

(c) Active participation in decision-making, planning and implementation: This is a higher level of participation where stakeholders actively engage in decision-making and policy-making as well as in the implementation of the outcomes. Active involvement implies that the stakeholders are invited to contribute actively to the planning process by discussing issues and contributing to their solutions. However, beyond inputs into the planning, it is also crucial to ensure public participation in the actual implementation of projects as a key for sound results.

23. There are many potential benefits from public participation in decision-making and implementation of environmental programs and policies. When the appropriate channels of horizontal communication between government bodies and civil society representatives at various levels are opened, a public participation process is established which can lead, among others, to the following externalities and benefits:

- (a) A strong sense of shared ownership of decisions, therefore improved chances of taking decisions of which relevant stakeholders are aware and in agreement with.
- (b) Public awareness and opportunity to exchange views and opinions with a wide variety of involved persons;
- (c) Government accountability and efficiency;
- (d) A culture of cooperation to defuse and prevent conflicts and tensions;
- (e) Pooling of ideas and taping into locally-relevant information which are essential for decision-making;
- (f) The opportunity for citizens to exercise their democratic rights in the decision-making process in accordance with the national legislation;
- (g) A higher degree of compliance with regional treaties which in the long-term, can reduce the costs of enforcement.

24. Yet, public participation is a complicated process. Among the many challenges, public participation may be hampered by low prioritization, unreliable environmental information, lack of capacity and funding to organize participation, lack of adequate representation of the larger public by NGOs, other public organizations and citizen groups, resistance to the concept of participation by some interest groups, political and administrative barriers to greater participation and attention to other short-term priorities dictated by economic conditions. In addition, there may be a lack of incentives, especially of economic ones, to change people's behaviour at all levels.

25. The lack of public participation, however, can lead to public critique and protests, delays in decision-making and implementation (e.g. via legal or administrative interventions), and complications in foreign aid and in supporting activities which require the execution of such processes.

26. The strategy will complement national and local actions by offering a strategic approach to reach objectives at various levels and give the following results:

- (a) Strengthening of the institutional and legal basis for public participation in taking steps for the effective management and sustainable use of resources of the Caspian Sea, contributing to its unique ecosystems and biodiversity;
- (b) Enhancing the role of key Caspian stakeholders in order to contribute to decision-making process related to the use, protection and reproduction of the Caspian Sea biological resources;
- (c) Robust administrative systems to ensure the provision of and open access to environmental information;
- (d) Ensuring awareness of coastal communities on issues related to environmental problems in the Caspian Sea and jointly searching the best ways to solve them;
- (e) Seeking of ways for partnerships and networking among stakeholders and government bodies;
- (f) Ensuring real opportunities for public participation in the process of protecting and rehabilitating the Caspian environment;
- (g) Incentives for inter-sectoral cooperation, including participation of the largest possible number of stakeholders, in the implementation of specific projects of the SCAP;
- (h) Interest by all Caspian littoral states to, as appropriate, adopt and implement the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (1998);
- (i) Introduction and strengthening of adaptive management practices for using natural resources based on the principles of mutual trust and goodwill between environmental organizations and local Caspian communities.

27. Ultimately, the PPS will facilitate greater public involvement in the protection of the Caspian Sea environment. In order to increase the interest of the public for environmental issues, awareness-raising activities demonstrating why it is important to care for the Caspian Sea and showing opportunities how the public can directly contribute to its conservation and sustainable use must be undertaken. Realistic and feasible alternatives to the current situation should be determined and the best mechanisms for fostering cooperation of all stakeholders will be worked out. As a key stakeholder in the Caspian Sea management, the public should have better access to transparent environmental information, and thereby will be able to offer suggestions and participate in decisions on the development of mechanisms for the implementation and funding of projects aimed at protecting and conserving the Caspian Sea and using its natural resources in a sustainable manner.

Access to information, capacity building and institutional development

28. The mechanism for achieving the objectives of the public participation strategy is organized through two main types of action. Together these types will develop and define incentives for the public to take meaningful action with visible benefits:

- A. Awareness-raising, capacity building and facilitating a system-wide, transparent flow of information
- B. Establishing and strengthening the legal and institutional basis for public participation

A. Awareness-raising, capacity building and facilitating of transparent flow of information

29. Lack of adequate interaction between NGOs, authorities, academia and the business sector at all levels hampers the system-wide flow of information. The problems are exacerbated by the geographic distances between them, especially at the local level. Furthermore, undeveloped systems for the flow of information hamper proper decision-making for the rational use of natural resources. The SCAP identifies gaps in data and information available to decision-makers and to the public. Data is varying considerably across the region; in some areas it is insufficient and inaccurate and sometimes not freely exchanged among different institutions. Even though national legislation requires open access to information, the Caspian countries are facing a number of problems in the dissemination of information, as for example a lack of technologies for information exchange, non-user friendly formats and insufficient media attention to environmental issues, which hamper the efforts made. Information here refers to the planning and implementation of activities, the funding modalities, the monitoring of outcomes, legal and institutional mechanisms and any other information the public requires in order to “own” the objective of environmental management.

30. Awareness-raising on environmental issues around the Caspian Sea is essential for ensuring participation in solving acute problems. Currently, not all stakeholders, including the public, especially at the local level, are aware of and concerned about environmental issues of the Caspian Sea and the implications of the relevant regional and international conventions. Awareness-raising is imperative to link decision-making to the concerns of the public, and vice versa. Yet, information is often lacking not only because of the absence of mechanisms described above, but also due to a lack of funds, environmental illiteracy, frequent administrative reforms of national authorities, insufficient information about the activities at the local level, and lack of strategic partnerships.

31. It is important to develop accessible and appropriate sources of information about the Caspian environment for different stakeholders through creating a robust information system. This will ensure that the public has access to information, is aware and therefore capable to participate in a meaningful way. It is essential to develop plans for capacity building in order to raise awareness and the possibility for different stakeholders to be engaged in solving the environmental issues related to the Caspian Sea. It means capacity building for civil society organizations, the public and decision-makers to facilitate and support public participation. Mechanisms should include public awareness about opportunity costs, building the capacity of the media to report on environmental issues, integrating environmental education into the formal and non-formal curricula at all levels and creating opportunities for networking and communities to be involved.

32. Caspian coastal communities should become aware of and understand key environmental issues and their solutions, and have the confidence to really participate in decision-making. Otherwise opportunities for improving the environment and thereby fostering economic development and raising livelihoods are missed. Until incentives for change are not internalized and negotiated by the public and by those in a position to alter policies and practices, the situation will not change.

B. Establishing and strengthening the legal and institutional basis for public participation

33. All the littoral states have comprehensive laws on environment protection and on the use of natural resources, supported by provisions in their constitutions and all littoral states have now signed and ratified the Tehran Convention.

34. However, the challenge for the Caspian countries will be to strengthen institutional arrangements in order to better reinforce the implementation of environmental protection measures. There is a need to streamline policies, to build capacity in institutions and to reform the relevant sectors. The integration of development planning processes and environmental management is still in its initial stages. Not all Caspian countries are Party to the Aarhus Convention and for those who are, capacity building is required to implement the Convention. Yet, institutional mechanisms are important to regulate behaviours and activities that affect the coastal communities. Governments and local authorities will need to more rigidly apply the existing legal requirements for ensuring public participation in order to benefit from a well informed and involved public in environmental decision-making.

35. It is necessary to ensure that the institutional and legal basis for public participation is in place and effectively implemented. This would, for example, require ensuring that environmental impact assessments include effective public participation and mechanisms for public access to results of the assessment. The PPS is meant to ensure that public participation takes place in the implementation of all related programs and plans.

36. Participation should be institutionalized at various stages of planning and decision-making: at the diagnostic level, during the study to collect information, at the design level, at the implementation level of the action plan or policy, and at the evaluation and monitoring level.

37. Key principles associated with public participation include: transparency, openness, joint search for so-called “win-win” solutions and the development of mutual trust.

38. At the moment, a number of factors could delay the design and implementation of an operational plan to implement the PPS in the Caspian region. These need to be recognized, prevented and negotiated with different stakeholders at all levels in order to ensure success. Consequently, the Caspian PPS is divided into three levels: regional (international), national, and local (sub-national) level.

Regional Level:

39. Given the complexity of the Caspian basin, national differences, the multitude of languages etc., a regional strategy is useful in stimulating engagement at other levels. The regional level is important to provide the framework and possibilities for cooperation and interaction throughout. Often, this level is the most effective and most appropriate level for dialogue. The establishment of dialogue platforms arranged at this level – including municipalities, regional environmental inspectorates, water suppliers, local businesses, NGOs and other stakeholders – would be an ideal first step towards building new forms of partnership and cooperation. It is also necessary to develop and endorse a common methodology and practice for public involvement in the process of decision-making.

40. The PPS at the regional level fulfils the following functions:

- (a) Framework for cooperation and interaction;
- (b) Stimulating action at other levels;
- (c) Platform for dialogue;
- (d) Dissemination of new methodologies and guidance;

- (e) Information and expertise;
- (f) Contribution to monitoring and evaluation;

National level:

41. It is the most convenient level for governments, NGOs and other interest groups (farmers associations, industry etc.) at various levels to come together to discuss their different motivations for engaging in the implementation process of decisions and to define who can contribute what to the process. At the national level many of the political and economic decisions are made, and so clearly there is a need for a PPS in those national processes and decision-making forums. Since there are no language barriers, the national level may also be the most appropriate for much of the necessary public awareness and information activity. The national level is also key because here key stakeholders (governmental, academic, NGO) are able to play the role of facilitator in order to influence the most relevant actors at the most relevant level. At the national level it is also important to encourage active participation of the public in the legislative process.

42. The PPS for the national level will help:

- (a) Defining roles and responsibilities;
- (b) Sharing of best practices;
- (c) Influencing where policy and economic decisions are made;
- (d) Building partnerships between national authorities and NGOs;
- (e) Acting as the facilitator of up-stream and down-stream information on decision-making;
- (f) Preparing for the implementation of the Aarhus Convention;
- (g) Organizing public awareness campaigns;
- (n) Guiding and monitoring the public participation processes and implications.

Local level (sub-national), which refers to local communities and local administrations

43. The local level is where actions really take place, where policies adopted at the higher levels are actually implemented in the regions by local authorities, stakeholders, and practitioners. It is at the local level where those groups which are most directly affected by environmental decisions reside. There is an enormous need for capacity building, training, education and awareness raising work at this level. Most local agencies and actors are largely unaware of the implications of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea with regard to civil society engagement in environmental protection. Furthermore, economic incentives need to be designed in order to motivate the public to participate. At the same time, the public should be informed and consulted to contribute to planning, as well as to partner in the implementation of activities and to conduct monitoring in order to “own” the PPS. For enhancing public participation Local Environmental Action Plans should be developed and adopted at the local level and implemented by local institutions.

44. The strategy at the local level has the following functions:

- (a) Awareness raising among communities;
- (b) Changing the behaviour of the public through motivation and incentives;
- (c) Fostering partnerships between the local administration and local communities, public organizations and CBOs;
- (d) Mobilization of the media;
- (e) Training and education programs;
- (f) Introduction of consultative systems which allow the public to identify their issues, and take an active part in the design, implementation and monitoring of new and existing initiatives;

- (g) Inducing self-determination and self-direction of the public in finding solutions for environmental problems and to contribute to the outcomes;
- (h) Capacity building of information centres and networks, including knowledge management.

45. All three levels are equally important and need to interact in harmony in order to render measures on any single level successfully. There are differences between these levels regarding who the stakeholders are, what their capacity is, what types of activities are required, in which timeline, and how to manage and coordinate these activities. The tensions between national and local authorities and their budgets and administration should also be taken into account. Often national budgets do not trickle down to local levels (districts). A system of transparent and system-wide cooperation needs to create links between the various levels.

46. Developing these objectives for each level should be incorporated into projects and programs outlining specific activities, timelines and resources. Monitoring and evaluation should be done in cooperation with key stakeholders at all levels.

Annexes

Annex 1 - List of Abbreviations

“CASPECO”:	UNDP-GEF project “The Caspian Sea: Restoring depleted fisheries and consolidation of a permanent regional environmental governance framework”
CBD:	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBO:	Community Based Organization
CCG:	Caspian Concern Group
CEP:	Caspian Environment Programme
GEF:	Global Environment Facility
EIA:	Environmental Impact Assessment
ESIA:	Environmental and Social Impact Assessment
EU/TACIS:	European Union/Technical Assistance for CIS
EQO:	Environmental Quality Objective
IPPA:	International Public Participation Advisor
IT:	Information Technology
MDG:	United Nations Millennium Development Goals
M & E:	Monitoring and Evaluation
MFA:	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MPPA:	Matched Small Grants and Public Participation Advisor
MSGP:	Matched Small Grants Programme
NCAP:	National Caspian Action Plan
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
NFP:	National Focal Point
PPS:	Public Participation Strategy
RAG:	Regional Advisory Group
SCAP:	Strategy Action Programme
SAR:	Stakeholder Analysis Revisited (Report)
SEA:	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SHA:	Stakeholder Analysis (Report)
TDA:	Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP:	United Nations Environment Programme

Annex 2 - The Teheran Convention and SCAP activities

The SCAP stipulates that “the principle of public participation and transparency shall be applied, such that all stakeholders, including communities, individuals and concerned organizations shall be given the opportunity to participate, at the appropriate level, in decision-making and management processes that affect the Caspian Sea. This includes providing access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities and effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings to engage all stakeholders to exercise their rights effectively. Public authorities shall widely disseminate information on the work proposed and undertaken to protect and rehabilitate the Caspian Sea.”

There are two specific components of the SCAP identifying public participation activities:

1. Exchange of and Access to Information (item 4.5, Article 21, paragraph 2)

The objective of this component is to ensure public access to information regarding the environmental status of the Caspian Sea.

In the context and in support of the implementation of the Tehran Convention, the following actions will be taken to exchange information on a regular basis:

- Ensure public access to information regarding the environmental conditions of the Caspian Sea;
- Ensure public access to information regarding measures taken or planned to be taken to prevent, control and reduce pollution of the Caspian Sea in accordance with national legislation and taking into account provisions of existing international agreements concerning public access to environmental information.

2. Civil society participation in Caspian environmental stewardship (item 5, Articles 5 (c), 18 and 21)

The objective of this component is to strengthen the participation of the civil society, together with the institutional and legal frameworks, in the environmental stewardship of the Caspian Sea.

The actions outlined below aim to increase the participation of the public in coastal communities, as well as of other stakeholders of Caspian countries, in the management of the Caspian environment; improve understanding on the part of local, regional and governmental authorities regarding the importance of environmental issues and increase their involvement in project implementation; and develop active partnerships between the Caspian NGO Forum, local and multinational enterprises, and other stakeholders in the region.

Some key mechanism will be achieved through improved environmental education programmes and better communications and information sharing.

2.2 Participation of public and stakeholders

- Promote the establishment of NGO partnerships to provide support and guidance for improving civil society involvement and strengthening of environmental NGO Networks.
- Implement the Caspian Public Participation Strategy through its incorporation in the National Caspian Action Programmes (NCAPs).
- Set up a fund for micro-grants addressing coastal community development schemes and local environmental issues, in partnership with the private sector and international donor community.

- Set up “Friends of Caspian Sea” programme, including an annual competition for the local, national and international companies that have achieved the most concrete gains in protection of the Caspian environment in the previous year, in at least two levels (national and international) on the territory of coastal region.

2.3 Communication and Information sharing

- Create a press bureau to improve national, regional and international awareness of the Caspian environmental issues, and encourage the media to participate in the dissemination of information.
- Strengthen awareness of environmental issues in the Caspian Sea through partnerships with national and international media.
- Provide regular training to civil society representatives in order to strengthen environmental journalism and improve media coverage of environmental issues.
- Establish media and film festivals, in conjunction with the Caspian NGO Forum, on Caspian ecology and culture to focus on the links between human behaviour and natural ecosystem functions.
- Establish “Caspian Sea Day” and raise environmental awareness for specific target groups.

2.4 Environmental Education

- Create Caspian Environmental Information, Communication, and Education Centers to provide information to the public on Caspian environmental issues.
- Develop academic curriculum materials focusing on Caspian environmental issues
- Encourage the development of university level curricula for ecology and environmental science in conjunction with international institutions featuring Caspian issues.
- Promote national and regional academic partnerships at school, college, institute and university levels.
- Provide a basic training course in ecology for local coastal enterprises and targeted populations emphasizing win-win scenarios and sound environmental stewardship.

2.5 Local, regional and governmental authorities

- Create targeted awareness building campaigns for ministerial authorities, regional administration and private sector involved in *inter alia*: agriculture, fisheries, transportation, and natural resource management.
- Implement national EIA procedures for all appropriate Caspian project developments, including provisions for public participation.
- Hold annual conferences for heads of cities sponsored by national and international partners to foster networking among coastal local authorities and enhance their participation in implementing Caspian environmental policies.

- Develop training programmes on awareness of environmental issues for local authorities, and national ministries, through Caspian Environmental Information, Communication, and Education Centres emphasizing the environmental evaluation techniques.
- Develop of training programmes for land/property agents, construction firms, regional, district and national level planning agencies on importance of coastal sustainable development practices with concrete examples of sustainable development projects.
- Develop training programmes for regional and municipal authorities on modern techniques for wastewater and municipal waste treatment.

2.6 Partnerships between Caspian NGO Forum, enterprises, and other stakeholders

- Promote environmental partnerships between NGOs, government and private sectors to address specific Caspian Sea issues by implementing the Caspian Public Participation Strategy.
- Develop Stakeholder Dialogue Groups at the national level and exchange experience at the regional level to improve dialogue opportunities for stakeholder groups who may be in conflict natural resource management.
- Develop a program to encourage implementation of cleaner technologies by local industries corresponding to ISO 14000.

Annex 3 – UNDP-GEF “CASPECO” project and public participation activities

This project builds upon a solid foundation of regional cooperation for Caspian environmental conservation put into place by the five Caspian states and the Caspian Environment Program over a period of more than 10 years with substantial catalytic support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Building on these achievements this project’s objective is to strengthen regional environmental governance and apply new thinking to the sustainable management and conservation of the Caspian’s bio-resources.

The GEF funded “CASPECO” project is designed to enable stakeholders to reduce stresses on ecosystem resilience, address their underlying causes and overcome the key barriers preventing progress on these issues. The following selection of key points is taken from the project document and is highly relevant to Caspian Sea stakeholders.

OUTCOME 4. ENHANCED STAKEHOLDERS’ ENGAGEMENT IN THE TC PROCESS AND IMPROVED PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON THE STATUS OF THE CASPIAN SEA ENVIRONMENT.

Output 6. Creation of solid regional NGO partnerships engaged in the implementation of the Tehran Convention and its protocols.

Activity 1. Align and streamline the existing CEP public participation strategy (PPS) to better support the requirements of the Convention and its protocols.

This activity will focus on adapting and aligning the existing PPS to the requirements of the Convention and its protocols with the overall objective to strengthen the involvement of the civil society in the Caspian Sea region in the implementation of the Tehran Convention. The existing PPS will be reviewed in light of the requirements of the Tehran Convention and the protocols with the view to prepare simplified and practical guidelines for civil society stakeholders’ engagement in the Tehran Convention process. The guidelines will be subject to intergovernmental review by the Contracting Parties and will provide basis for further regional efforts to strengthen stakeholders’ presence and involvement in the Convention process.

Activity 2. Creation of Caspian “Virtual Partnerships”

The need for solid and efficient regional NGO networks, encompassing national ones, has been voiced at several occasions in the context of the Caspian Environment Programme. The same needs are being brought forward in the context of the Convention process and ample attention will have to be given to those concerns. The first step for enhanced involvement of the civil society in the Convention process are structured, well-defined and efficient NGO partnerships that would allow for adequate and coordinated representation of the civil society in the context of the Convention and Protocol implementation.

Concrete support to the creation and maintenance of such partnerships will be provided on the basis of a website-based “virtual partnerships” that would be part of the overall Caspian Information Centre as described below under output 7. The Virtual Partnerships will include a website and an email list-serve. It will encourage the membership of community-based organizations (CBOs) and NGOs (registered and non-registered). The virtual partnership will be working in all regional languages as well as English, with country-specific content managed in each country respectively. The primary focus of the partnership will be to raise the visibility of local/national/regional NGOs in the Convention process through the implementation of small, well-defined pilot projects that concentrate

on attainable joint regional actions, including regional NGO activities in support of the Caspian Day celebrated every year on the 12th August.

Activity 3. Regional NGO meetings

Further support to the strengthening of the civil society engagement in the Convention process will be provided through regular regional NGO meetings that will allow the regional NGO community to exchange experiences, strategize and coordinate their input to the Convention process. Those meetings will be primarily held in conjunction with the Meetings of the Conference of the Parties, but also at other occasions as deemed necessary.

Output 7. Data/information sharing web-based Caspian Information Centre (CIC) incorporating Caspian environment status data.

Activity 1. Enhance data and information sharing through the establishment of a web-based CIC, incorporating available environment status data

This activity will promote data collection, monitoring, analysis, harmonization and public communication. It will build upon work done to create the Unified Environmental Monitoring Program under Component I, Output 2, Activity #1 and work done to harmonize environmental reporting under Component 2, Output 4. This activity will make harmonized data and related environmental reports from the Convention available on the Internet - accessible and transparent for the public – as a critical element to facilitating good regional environmental governance and to meet the requirements of the Tehran Convention, in particular of Art. 21. Upon request of the COP, the CIC will also be the host to a Tehran Convention website and to the above mentioned “Virtual NGO Partnership”.

Activity 2. Prepare the biennial report on the state of the environment of the Caspian Sea and a Biodiversity Atlas for the Caspian.

Public education is key element for enhanced public awareness of the conditions, challenges and threats to the environment of the Caspian Sea. Adequate education is relevant to all concerned stakeholders at all levels in the civil society. This activity will aim at ensuring and improving the availability of regular comprehensive reports providing accurate, up-to-date and accessible information about environmental conditions of the Caspian Sea and thereby enhancing the consciousness of the civil society.

The report will be prepared in close collaboration with main stakeholders and on the basis of scientific assessment. The activity will also contribute to the preparation of other relevant information/education materials including the Biodiversity Atlas of the Caspian Sea

All materials will be accessible through the CIC and will be widely distributed to the public.

There are also additional parts of the project documents which include public participation and stakeholders’ involvement. Please see the entire project document for more background information and an overview of project objectives and activities.