

FAST FACTS

United Nations
Development Programme



The Socotra Archipelago

Location

- The Socotra Archipelago is a part of the Republic of Yemen.
- Located in the northwestern Indian Ocean, about 350 km south of the Arabian peninsula.
- The archipelago consists of the main island of Socotra and three smaller islands:
 - Abd Al Kuri:** 25x5 km, about 200 inhabitants, reachable in 10 hours by boat from Qalansiya
 - Samha:** 10x5 km, about 60 inhabitants, reachable in 4 hours by boat from Qalansiya
 - Darsa:** not inhabited

Endemism

- The long geological isolation from Arabia and Africa has resulted in very high levels of endemism.
- **308 endemic plants** (36 % of the total), **36 endemic vertebrates** (reptiles, birds), more than **300 species of endemic invertebrates** are found on the islands.
- **Rich marine diversity:** to-date 33 genera of hermetic corals found; 3 possible endemic species including an ophichthis-like eel which may be new to science.

Uniqueness

- Socotra is the **9th of ten most important islands** in the world, in terms of biodiversity conservation importance. (Millet et al. 1996, Royal Botanical Garden Edinburgh)
- One of the **Globe 200 important eco regions** (according to WWF)
- Socotra forms **one of the world's 221 globally important Endemic Bird Areas** (BirdLife International recognizes 22 Important Bird Areas on the islands)
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) names 52 endemic Socotri plants in the **Red List of Threatened Species**.

- In 2003, the Archipelago pronounced **The Man and Biosphere Reserve** by UNESCO
- In 2008, listed as **The World Natural Heritage Site** by UNESCO

Population

- Population estimated **44 000 inhabitants**; 8000 Socotri live and work in the Emirates contributing considerably to the income of related families on the island.
- The inhabitants are mostly **semi-nomadic pastoralists**.
- Main economic activities: livestock production, fishing, date palm plantations, and primitive household gardens, with some minor forms of primarily opportunistic trade.
- Majority of male working population are **fishermen**. Except for dried fish, very little is exported from the island.

Culture

- The Socotri language is an **ancient unwritten language** of pre-Islamic origin, related to the Mahri language. The Socotri language has four dialect groups.
- With Arabic as the official language on the island, the local language and poetry are being lost at quite alarming rate.

Climate

- The Haghier Mountains (1526 m) in north-western part of the island.
- The eastern and central parts receive some rainfall during autumn and winter, the western part is arid.
 - October – May:** monsoon winds blowing from the northeast; March – May: temperatures above 40 °C
 - June – September:** winds blowing from the southwest

In this period, the island is accessible only by plane. Access by the sea is virtually impossible. Fishing is also impossible, people move from the northern coast to the mountains to escape the winds, and to harvest their date palms.

• **Four seasons on the island:**

Late June – early September = kharif (season of winds)

Late September – January = sereb (winter or rainy season)

January – early April = qeyat (quiet season)

Late April – early June = doti (post-summer season)

Biodiversity Conservation

• Over the years the islanders have developed **traditional ways of conserving** the natural resources that they depend upon, eg.:

bans on cutting of live trees (unless with the agreement of the village council and for valid reasons),
marine sanctuaries where no net fishing is allowed,
monthly “rest” period for all fishing grounds...

• Recently, the island’s isolation has been broken, mainly due to the opening of **the airport in 1999**

• Development threats:

Population increase (immigration from the mainland, internal population growth)

Unplanned investments and constructions

Natural resources exploitation (both terrestrial and marine)

• Well planned and properly managed ecotourism has always been regarded rather as an opportunity supporting local livelihoods than a threat.

• Number of tourist coming to Socotra has been growing dramatically: from 50 in 2000 to 3000 in 2008.

UNDP Biodiversity Conservation Projects

• **1997 – 2001** first GEF Socotra Biodiversity Project: Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Biodiversity of Socotra Archipelago (support from Netherlands + UNDP)
2001 – 2003 project extended

• **2003 – 2008** UNDP-bilateral donors: Socotra Conservation and Development Programme (SCDP)

• **2009 – 2013** GEF-UNDP: Strengthening Socotra’s Policy and Regulatory Framework for Mainstreaming Biodiversity

A bilateral project funded by: UNDP 975.000 \$
GEF 975.000 \$

Govt. of Yemen parallel funding up to 750.000 \$

Socotra Zoning Plan

• The most important tool developed by SCDP: **Socotra Zoning Plan** designing **Protected Areas** (signed by the president of Yemen in 2000)

• Designs four key types of zones in Socotra:

Resource Use Zones

General Use Zone

National Parks

Nature Sanctuaries

Last two considered as Protected Areas.

• There are 10 terrestrial Protected Areas (covering 72 % of the island surface) and 22 marine protected areas in the Socotra Archipelago.

• In several protected areas, local communities have been running campsites with basic facilities. The locals service the campsite and take the small profit from it.

• Campsites: Dihamri, Homhill, Amak, Rosh, Skund

For more information, visit:

<http://www.undp.org.ve>

<http://www.socotraisland.org>

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