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LITHUANIAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Institutional capacity building in the area of environment protection and climate change

Case study in Georgia

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Environmental Background and Context

Georgia is listed in two **biodiversity hotspots** out of 35 such hotspots (biologically rich and deeply threatened regions) defined in the world. The forests and other remnant habitats in all 35 biodiversity hotspots represent just 2.3% of Earth's land surface. But it would be difficult to find another 2.3% of the planet that is more important (Conservation International, 2016). The big part of Georgian territory belongs to the Caucasus biodiversity hotspot and small part of southern Georgia belongs to the Irano-Anatolian biodiversity hotspot.

Irano-Anatolian hotspot spans through 900,000 square kilometers of topographically complex and extensive system of mountains and closed basins that form a natural barrier between the ecosystems and indigenous cultures of the Mediterranean Basin and the dry plateaus of Western Asia. The Irano-Anatolian Hotspot contains many centers of local endemism (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, 2016).

Caucasus biodiversity hotspot spans through 500,000 square kilometers of mountains in Eurasia between the Black and Caspian seas. The unique geology and terrain of the Caucasus biodiversity hotspot, consisting of three major mountain chains separated by valleys and plains, permit a variety of different microclimate, soil and vegetative conditions, resulting in a broad range of landscapes and unusually high levels of species diversity for the Temperate Zone. Its varied ecosystems are home to more than twice the animal diversity found in adjacent regions of Europe and Asia. The hotspot boasts 6,500 species of vascular plants, a quarter of which are found nowhere else. The major ecosystems in the Caucasus hotspot consist of forests, high mountain habitats, dry mountain shrublands, steppes, semi-deserts and wetlands. The Caucasus Hotspot is also a globally significant center of cultural diversity, where a multitude of ethnic groups, languages and religions intermingle over a relatively small area. Indeed, humans have inhabited the Caucasus for millennia. Legions of rulers and government regimes have vied for control of the region and its rich natural and cultural resources. About 27 percent of the area remains as natural habitat but only about 12 percent of the original vegetation is considered pristine (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, 2004).

Having mentioned that **Georgian territory** belongs to even two biodiversity hotspots, it is easy to understand that the country hosts a high number and variety of different species. As a consequence to its geological history, its very diverse relief and climatic zones, a developed hydrographic system and a wide variety of soils, Georgia is rich in biodiversity and hosts a high level of endemism. A wide array of ecosystems is concentrated in a relatively small area contributing to the uniquely high level of biodiversity. Major biomes include floodplain forest, semi-desert, steppe, arid light woodland and hemixerophyte scrub, forest, sub-alpine, alpine, subnival and nival zones and wetlands. Georgia's flora is remarkably rich. There are 4,300 species of vascular plants, 600 of which are endemic to the Caucasus region and 300 endemic to the country. The country has a diverse fauna with 16,054 species described to date. The vertebrate fauna is presented by 758 species, with 76 mammal, 300 bird, 52 reptile, 12 amphibians and 84 fish species, including Caucasian endemics (IUCN, 2012).

As definition of a hotspot explains, Georgian territory is not only rich in biodiversity, but also its biodiversity is deeply threatened. Even though it is not possible to provide precise information on the state of species

because of the lack of research and monitoring, but currently in the **Georgian Red List** are listed 139 animal species and 56 wooded plant species; 43 of the animal species and 20 of the plant species are categorised as endangered or critically endangered; many of the animal species in the list are also considered globally threatened. The main reasons for habitat loss, overexploitation of natural resources, pollution, invasive alien species and climate change – consequently, decline of biodiversity - listed in National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan are:

- *the poverty of many, who are driven to use natural resources unsustainably for energy, food and financial gain;*
- *the greed and irresponsibility of a few who take and spoil without regard for their impact on the environment;*
- *ignorance about the importance of biodiversity and the impacts of people's own actions on biodiversity;*
- *the country's drive for economic development, which is essential for raising people out of poverty (Decree of the Government of Georgia No. 343, 2014).*

One of the most important shelters for biodiversity in Georgia are its **forests**. “Forests are one of the most valuable natural resources in Georgia. They occupy about 40% of the territory of the country and have an exceptional importance at national, regional and global level. Georgian forests not only conserve the unique biological diversity, but ensure continuous delivery of vital direct or indirect benefits and resources to the population. This in turn facilitates the development of different fields of industry, the growth of the well-being of the population, poverty elevation and creates favourable conditions for the sustainable development of the country.” National Forest Concept for Georgia, 2014.

To protect its biodiversity Georgia has old and well developed system of **protected areas** (PAs). The first official protected area in Georgia, the Lagodekhi Reserve, was established in 1912. The system of PAs in Georgia grew gradually and now is covering about 7.47% of the country's overall territory. Law on the Protected Area System, which came into force in 1996, defines protected area management categories (based on IUCN categories) and their establishment procedures. Besides IUCN categories, the law also allows the establishment of PAs of global importance such as a biosphere reserve, a Ramsar site and a World Heritage site. However, still a number of problems prevail, such as lack of representativeness and connectivity of the protected area network, ineffectiveness of protected areas management, low public awareness and participation and lack of financing. Another challenge, which Georgia is currently facing is a commitment to harmonize Georgian laws with the EU directives such as Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) and Habitats Directive (92/43/EC), which demand designation of special protection areas for bird species and Emerald sites (Decree of the Government of Georgia No. 343, 2014).

Legal and Policy Framework

Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part was signed on 27 June 2014 and entered into force on 21 July 2016, which replaced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed in 1999. The Association Agreement foresees strengthening and widening relations between the Parties in an ambitious and innovative way.

The Parties recognised the importance of ensuring the conservation and the sustainable management of forests and biodiversity and contribution of forests and other ecosystems to the Parties' economic, environmental and social objectives. Conservation of biological diversity and forests is established in the Chapters "Environment" and "Trade and Sustainable Development". Article 233 in the Chapter "Trade and Sustainable Development" defines **sustainable management of forests** and trade in forest products by:

(a) promoting trade in forest products derived from sustainably managed forests, harvested in accordance with the domestic legislation of the country of harvest, which could include bilateral or regional agreements to that end;

(b) exchanging information on measures to promote the consumption of timber and timber products from sustainably managed forests and, where relevant, cooperate to developing such measures;

(c) adopting measures to promote the conservation of forest cover and combat illegal logging and related trade, including with respect to third countries, as appropriate;

(d) exchanging information on actions for improving forest governance and where relevant cooperating to maximise the impact and ensure the mutual supportiveness of their respective policies aiming at excluding illegally harvested timber and timber products from trade flows;

(e) promoting the listing of timber species under CITES where the conservation status of those species is considered at risk; and

(f) cooperating at the regional and the global levels with the aim of promoting the conservation of forest cover and the sustainable management of all types of forests.

Georgia undertakes to gradually approximate its legislation to the number of EU legislation and international instruments within the stipulated timeframes, including two Directives on nature protection. The following provisions of **Directive 2009/147/EC** of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds (**Birds Directive**) shall apply:

- *adoption of national legislation and designation of competent authority/ies;*
- *assessment of bird species requiring special conservation measures and regularly occurring migratory species;*

- *identification and designation of special protection areas for bird species (Article 4(1));*
- *establishment of special conservation measures to protect regularly occurring migratory species (Article 4(2));*
- *establishment of a general system of protection for all wild bird species of which the hunted species are a special subset and prohibition of certain types of capture/killing (Articles 5, 6, 7 and 8 and Article 9(1) and 9(2)).*

The following provisions of **Council Directive 92/43/EC** of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (**Habitats Directive**) as amended by Directive 97/62/EC, 2006/105/EC and Regulation (EC) No 1882/2003 shall apply:

- *adoption of national legislation and designation of competent authority/ies;*
- *completion of inventory of Emerald sites, designation of these sites and establish priorities for their management (Article 4);*
- *establishment of measures required for the conservation of such sites (Article 6);*
- *establishment of a system to monitor conservation status of pertinent habitats and protected species as relevant for Georgia (Article 11);*
- *establishment of a strict species protection regime for species listed in Annex IV of this Directive as relevant for Georgia and in line with reservations made by Georgia for some species in the Council of Europe Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Article 12);*
- *establishment of a mechanism to promote education and general information to the public (Article 22(c)).*

Each provision has a specific timetable, which varies from two to eight years of the entry into force of the Agreement, which is a rather short time span for implementation of the reforms.

Charter on European and Euro-Atlantic integration between the Republic of Lithuania and Georgia was signed 18 June 2015 and updated the Charter signed on 2009. The new Charter not only continues Georgia's integration into the EU, but also develops the cooperation further, for example by promising Lithuanian expert support for the implementation of the Association Agreement and by providing assistance in strengthening administrative and institutional capacities of Georgia through expert support and implementation of joint projects. Besides the provisions listed in the Association Agreement named above, the Charter defines environment protection and climate change as areas for cooperation and sharing of experience.

Project description and Key objectives

The project was designed with the **aim** to increase Georgian institutional capacity in the area of environment protection. In the wide field of environment protection two areas were chosen:

- development of Emerald network and
- sustainable forestry and biodiversity management in forest related ecosystems.

These areas were chosen because of their overall importance for biodiversity conservation, sustainable development and climate change prevention, and because of already ongoing work in Georgia. In the end of 2013 Georgian Parliament adopted National Forest Concept. National Forest Program was started to implement reforms in forestry sector in compliance to National Forest Concept. In 2014 Government adopted National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2014-2020 (NBSAP). In June of 2014 EU-Georgia Association Agreement was signed. Association Agreement covers establishment of Emerald Network and forestry issues.

The key **objectives** and foreseen activities of the project were:

1. Provide Georgian state agencies with international and national expert input during the preparation of the new forestry/nature protection legislation by:
 - 1.1. Participation of Georgian experts in development of legal acts related to forest management/nature conservation;
 - 1.2. Preparing a policy paper about main requirements in LT legislation for establishment and management of sites protected under the Habitat and Bird directives;
 - 1.3. In Georgia: Preparation of white paper (guidelines of forest categorization/spatial planning to help establishment and management of Emerald sites) for decision-makers, private sector and civil society groups active in a field of forestry, biodiversity conservation and land use;
 - 1.4. In Georgia: Policy brief for decision makers, members of parliament and general public: about EU directives and obligations of Association Agreement related to Nature Conservation; Convergence of Georgian legislation and current challenges;
 - 1.5. Roundtable meeting with stakeholders in Georgia to discuss EU association agreement related problems.
2. To organise a workshop in Georgia:
 - 2.1. Workshop and study tour in Georgia to discuss: draft "Nature Conservation Law"; draft "Forestry Law"; their compliance with EU Legislation; presentation of Lithuanian examples/ experience; presentation of policy paper about main requirements of LT law and what should be reflected in GE nature conservation.

3. To organise a study tour in Lithuania:
 - 3.1. Study tour in Lithuania to see examples of management of NATURA 2000 sites, Nature monuments, management of forests favourable for nature conservation; to discuss what could be applied in GE nature conservation
4. To ensure project visibility:
 - 4.1. Case study summarizing project activities, results and lessons learned will be prepared;
 - 4.2. Prepared papers and briefs will be uploaded to GA website and promoted through different social media networks and national web-portals dedicated to forestry/nature conservation issues;
 - 4.3. A press article about the project for the specialists and general public will be published in the LFN website.

Activities 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 4.1 and 4.3 were implemented in 2016, activities 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 3.1 and 4.2 are considered to be implemented in 2017.

Implementation

1.1. Participation of Georgian experts in development of legal acts related to forest management/nature conservation

25 meetings with various stakeholders were organised (including representatives of Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia (MENRP), National Forest Agency of Georgia (NFA), Agency of Protected Areas of Georgia (APA), private sector, NGOs. More than 10 recommendations were accepted and draft laws of *Biodiversity* and *Forest Code* were amended. Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection asked Green Alternative to help in preparation of sub-law on forest categorization. According to new Georgian legislation Forest categorization and spatial planning will be an important step for elaboration of “Emerald network”. Representatives of private sector – (owner of long term license of hunting farm – Chiauri riparian forest, East Georgia) expressed interest of collaboration with project. He proposed to include the territory in Emerald network.

1.2. Preparing a policy paper about main requirements in LT legislation for establishment and management of sites protected under the Habitat and Bird directives

The Policy Paper prepared describes Lithuanian transition from system of protected areas, which was in Soviet Union, to current – EU system of protected areas and underlines challenges and opportunities of the process. It describes in detail Natura 2000 implementation stages in Lithuania, lists main milestones of each stage, comments on implementation tactics and answers the specific questions raised by Georgian participants in the workshop organized in Tbilisi June 2016 (Activity 2.1).

Five **implementation stages** were defined:

1. Sites identification and selection (milestones: Preparation of national habitat interpretation manuals; Habitats and species inventories; Development of criteria for selection of sites of Community importance (SCIs) and for Special Protection Areas (SPAs); Identification and delineation of potential SCIs and SPAs; Establishment of SPAs: approval of national legal acts on establishment, preparation of standard data forms and submission of data base to European Commission (EC); Preparation of standard data forms for potential SCIs; National approval and submission of proposal to EC on potential SCIs: submission of Natura 2000 data base; Biogeographical Seminar – evaluation of sufficiency of proposed network of proposed SCIs; EC’s decision on approval of initial List of SCIs; Eventual Addition of new sites to the proposed list; EC’s decision on approval of updated List of sites of Community importance);
2. Designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) (milestones: Setting conservation objectives at national level; Setting conservation objectives (conservation priorities) for individual sites; Adopting national legal act on designation of SACs);
3. Setting necessary conservation measures for the sites (milestones: Identification of ecological requirements of the habitats types and species; Identification and legal approval of passive conservation measures for the sites; Identification, development and implementation of active management measures for the sites; Update of estimations of costs for establishment of necessary conservation measures and preparation of Priority Action Framework (PAF));
4. Assurance of ecological connectivity (milestones: Identification of methodology and legal options for improvement of ecological coherence of Natura 2000 network; Restoration and management of elements of ecological network);
5. Surveillance of the conservation status (milestones: Development of monitoring methodology for habitats and species; Setting favourable reference values for habitats and species; Monitoring data inside and outside of Natura 2000 network collected and conservation status analysed; Report on HD implementation prepared: conservation status of habitats and species assessed along with evaluation of effects of conservation measures).

After the workshop organised in Tbilisi in June 2016 (please see described more in detail under Activity 2.1) a number of questions were raised asking what should be reflected from Lithuanian experience in Georgian nature conservation legislation, what should be included in new forestry and nature conservation to harmonise it with EU legislation. Also more detailed questions were asked, for example about the role of the Environmental Impact Assessment in establishment and management of NATURA 2000 sites, and importance of spatial planning; main requirements of Nature protection legislation related to spatial planning. The answers to all the questions were incorporated into the Policy Paper. The Policy Paper will be translated to Georgian and distributed to the interested stakeholders.

2.1. Workshop and study tour in Georgia

The workshop was organised in Tbilisi on 9 June 2016. Its aims were to present Lithuanian examples and experience, and to discuss draft “Nature Conservation Law”, draft “Forestry Law” and their compliance with EU Legislation. The workshop started from presentation of current situation in Georgia, problems and challenges by Irakli Macharashvili from Green Alternative. Afterwards development of Emerald network in Georgia was presented by Kakha Artsivadze from NACRES (Noah’s Arc centre for Recovery of Endangered Species).



Irakli Macharashvili presenting problems and challenges Georgia is currently facing.

Lithuanian situation was presented in five presentations. First of all, Edmundas Greimas from Lithuanian Fund for Nature told about the beginning of implementation of Bird and Habitat Directives in Lithuania: historical view backward to the beginning of a long way forward. This presentation was followed by explanation of the current situation by Algirdas Klimavičius from the Lithuanian Ministry of Environment, who presented legal and practical challenges of implementation of NATURA 2000 before and after accession to EU and Džiugas Anuškevičius from the Lithuanian Ministry of Environment, who presented implementation of Bird Directive – big step forward to better protection of birds in Lithuania. These presentations were followed by two speakers from Lithuania, presenting field examples of nature conservation. Danas Augutis from Lithuanian Fund for Nature spoke about switching from static protection to conservation of natural values with active management and told about examples of forest management for nature conservation. Dalia Bastytė from Lithuanian Fund for Nature spoke about ecological networks in Lithuania: their meaning, status and functionality and presented two examples from Lithuania – Nature Frame as a structural universal network and Ecological Network for reptiles and amphibians as a functional, local, specialised network for increasing of connectivity between Natura 2000 sites.

27 participants participated in the workshop. The organisations and institutions, which they were representing ranged from Biodiversity Protection Service in Georgian Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection, Agency of Protected Areas, National Forest Agency, Forest Policy Service to Environmental Information and Education Centre, Ilia State University, Ministry of Education and REC

Caucasus (The Regional Environmental Centre For The Caucasus), USAID G4G (Governing for Growth (G4G) in Georgia), GFA Consulting Group Support Programme of Protected Areas of Georgia (SPPA-Georgia) BMZ (Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung), GIZ/Ibis (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) and Fauna & Flora International (FFI).

The presentations were followed by discussions about compliance of Georgian legal acts with EU nature conservation legislation, possibilities for improvement of the legal acts. The workshop was finalised with decision to send questions from the Georgian participants to the Lithuanian speakers that they would incorporate the answers into the Policy Paper (Activity 1.2).



Participants of the workshop

The study tour was organised the next day after the workshop. The aim of the study tour was to screen Georgian situation and to understand problems appearing in the nature conservation, what helped in preparation of the policy paper. In the study tour participated Lithuanian delegation from the Ministry of Environment and Lithuanian Fund for Nature, who were accompanied by Irakli Macharashvili from Green Alternative and Khatuna Tsiklauri from the Agency of Protected Areas. Potential sites of Emerald network were visited: Algeti National Park and Dashbash Canyon (Natural monument).

Director of Algeti National Park Administration Avtandil Mchedlidze made a presentation about the Park, its nature, current management efforts and occurring problems. The Algeti National Park was established first as the Algeti Strict Nature Reserve in 1965 with the purpose of protection of the southeastern border of distribution of the Eastern Spruce and Nordmann Fir. In 2007 it was given a status of the National Park. The

Park covers the southern slopes of eastern part of the Trialeti range in the gorge of the Algeti River and is situated within 1100 – 1950 m above sea level. It is characterized by a mountainous relief rugged with great number of small rivers and ravines. Rich composition of flora occurs in the area of the Park – even 1664 plant species. A significant number of red list (e.g. *Ursus arctos*, *Lynx lynx*), relict and endemic species of animals and birds make this site crucial for biodiversity conservation. The director noticed that one of the problems, which threatens biodiversity of the Park are activities of the local population – putting cattle out to pasture or collecting firewood in the area of the Park. Other problem is lack of financing to establish infrastructure for the tourism, that the Park was more attractive for the visitors.

After visiting some sites in Algeti National Park, the participants of the study tour went to Dashbash Canyon. This Natural Monument is a canyon carved by Ktsia (Khrami) River in the stream bed cut through the volcanicogenic rocks of Dashbash volcanic plateau, distinguished by its rarity and biodiversity. It is located at 1,110-1,448 m above sea level. The vegetation cover of the surrounding ecosystem is rather sparse, whereas the plants on the steep slopes of the canyon and astounding waterfalls create absolutely different micro-landscape, with characteristic micro-climate and specific fauna (Agency of Protected Areas, 2014).



Participants of the study tour by Dashbash Canyon

4. Ensuring project visibility

This case study is one of the activities implemented to ensure the project visibility. The project was made visible using other means too. Articles in the news sections of Lithuanian Fund for Nature website:

http://www.glis.lt/?pid=1&news_id=524

And Green Alternative website:

<http://greenalt.org/news/workshop/>

<http://greenalt.org/news/workshop-institutional-capacity-building-in-the-area-of-environment-protection/>

Also, comments of Green Alternative's experts related to new (draft) legislation were published at Green alternatives website and Facebook and also official website of the Ministry (MENRP). Information was distributed through national media (TVs, information agencies).

Conclusions

Having in mind wideness of the project topic it is difficult to draw concrete conclusions. As it was noticed by the project partners Green Alternative - main challenges currently in Georgia are: elaboration of new forestry legislation and reforming of the forest sector (make it more environmentally friendly and oriented towards sustainable development); elaboration of new nature protection (biodiversity conservation) legislation; establishment of Emerald sites and Important Bird areas (IBAs) (included territories of existing protected areas, territories of national forests managed by National forestry Agency, territories of national forests managed by long term license owners). Resolving some of these challenges was facilitated by the workshop and policy paper prepared during the project.

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