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SERVICES OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE OF AN INTERNATIONAL FORESTRY EXPERT TO THE PROJECT
“INCREASING THE RESILIENCE OF FOREST ECOSYSTEMS AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE SOUTHERN
CAUCASUS THROUGH FOREST TRANSFORMATION”
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REPORT OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE

“ON CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS ON FORESTS AND BEST PRACTICE IN FOREST TRANSFORMATION IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS COUNTRIES”

HELD ON 27 FEBRUARY 2013 AT THE MARRIOT HOTEL, TBILISI, GEORGIA

VERSION 2



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1. Introduction

This document is a report of the regional workshop which was held in Tbilisi, Georgia on 27 February 2013 in the framework of the project “*Increasing the resilience of forest ecosystems against climate change in the South Caucasus Countries¹ through forest transformation*”. The project is being implemented by WWF Caucasus Programme Office (WWF-Caucasus) in partnership with WWF-Germany, WWF-Armenia and WWF-Azerbaijan. The project is being financed by the European Union (EU) in the framework of the EU’s Thematic Programme on Environment and Natural Resources including Energy (ENRTP). Information about the objectives, expected results and planned activities of the Project can be found on the project’s web pages at:

http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/where_we_work/black_sea_basin/caucasus/projects/eu_en_rtp_caucasus/

2. Conference objectives, expected outputs, participants and formalities

2.1. Objectives

The main objective of the conference was to exchange information and share the experience among senior forest engineers, forest ecologists and other stakeholders in the region on climate change impacts on forests and best practice in forest transformation. The conference was designed as a forum for discussing the range of measures appropriate for forest stands in the target countries, in particular measures already implemented within the framework of the project and measures to pilot in future. The conference agenda is at Annex 1.

2.2. Expected Outputs

The conference was aimed at strengthening participant’s knowledge about climate change impacts on forests and of transformation strategies so that they would be able to develop policies that increase the resilience of forests in the region and to act for support of these policies from ministers and other relevant agencies.

2.3. Participants

The conference action targeted policy makers in the forestry administrations of the target countries. 35 people participated, including experts from the forest administrations and academic institutions of the target countries, from international organizations active in the target countries, and two experts from EU countries with knowledge of climate change impacts on forests and experience with transformation measures. The list of participants is at Annex 2.

2.4. Formalities

The conference was opened by Giorgi Sanadiradze, Director of WWF Caucasus and moderated by Mike Garforth, international expert in natural resources management.

¹ The Project’s target countries are Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

3. Proceedings

3.1. First session – Overview of the project

In the first session the Project Regional Coordinator, Malkaz Dzeneladze, presented an overview of the project (see Presentation 1). Mr Dzeneladze described the EU Thematic Programme on Environment and Sustainable Management of Natural Resources which was financing the Project, the objectives of the project and the organisational set-up of the Project.

3.2. Second session – Climate change impacts on forests and adaption strategies

The second session Rolf Schulzke, expert of the State Forestry Organisation Hessen-Forest, gave a presentation on the experience of the German State of Hesse with the transformation of forests as a silvicultural strategy (Presentation 2) and Mike Garforth gave a presentation on the impacts of climate changes on forests and strategies for mitigating and adapting to the impacts.

Mr Schulzke began his presentation by describing the forests of Hesse. He noted that in the absence of human interference would be nearly completely covered by forests, mainly beech forest types. Overexploitation led to Hesse's forest cover being reduced to about 20% of the territory of the state by the year 1800. The situation was reversed by a programme of reafforestation – mainly with *Picea abies* – and forest cover now stands at about 40%. The reliance on one species – a species that was not well adapted to many of the sites where it had been planted – resulted in forest stands having limited biodiversity, widespread occurrence of diseases, threats to forests' protective functions and additional threats due to effects of climate change.

In response the Hesse started a programme to transform monoculture *Picea abies* forests to forests of mixed species that would be richer in biodiversity and more resilient to the impacts of climate change. The Hesse government carried out transformation measures in the state forests and provided grants to help pay for transformation measures in privately-owned forests. The grants were financed partly by the EU. The measures taken by the state forest management organisation – Hessen Forests – and private owners have resulted in a substantial increase in the proportion of forest which is representative of the natural state and in the proportion of multi-storeyed stands and mixed species stands. Forests that have been transformed are no less productive than the monoculture stands which they have succeeded.

Mr Garforth had based his presentation on analyses of climate change impacts on forests and possible mitigation and adaptation strategies that were described in a report published in 2012 in the framework of the Project and a report published by WWF in 2011. Mr Garforth noted that changes in the region's climate due to emissions of greenhouse gases were already being observed and that the climate would continue to change for decades to come even if emissions were cut immediately to pre-industrial levels. Models of the region's future climate under different scenarios predicted increases in temperature and reductions in precipitation, though the intensities of the changes varied considerably between models and within a model in different parts of the region. Modelling of the suitability of the region under predicted future climatic conditions for the forest formations found in the region indicated that the area suited to most forest formations will be smaller than today, though with significant regional variation (under the least pessimistic climate scenario a larger area of Georgia would be suited to formations present in the region today).

In addition to the impacts of gradual changes in the climate forests would be exposed to: more frequent and more intense storms, causing “windthrow” and stem break; heavy rains, causing soil erosion and landslides; increased drought in parts of the region; increased risk of forest fires; increased risk of outbreaks of pests and diseases; more attractive conditions for alien invasive species. Mr Garforth noted that doing nothing in the face of such impacts was not a serious option and reacting only after forests had suffered negative impacts was second best to planned adaptation. In spite of the high degree of uncertainty about the exact nature and scale of the impacts of climate change on forests, state forest authorities and forest managers needed to start developing and implementing adaptation strategies now. Mr Garforth described the measures available to forest managers, some of which had been described by Mr Schulzke. Mr Garforth said that governments must help by providing a supportive policy environment and funding for adaptation. Government responses included: making appropriate changes to forest law and strengthening forest law enforcement mechanisms; promoting and funding supportive research and monitoring; communicating the threat to forests and the need for action; becoming leaders of forest adaptation. He noted that the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, in the framework of the Forest Europe process, are committed to elaborating and implementing forest adaptation strategies. He described the important elements of adaptation strategies and reiterated the target presented in the two publications mentioned above that by 2015 Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia will have adopted and will be implementing national strategies for mitigating, and adapting to, the impacts of climate change on forests.

The following points arose during the discussion:

- i) In Hesse foresters did not limit themselves to native species for use in forest transformation: *Pseudotsuga menziesii* – a North American species – was widely used because it was well adapted to site conditions in Hesse. Before using non-native species it was important to conduct assessments of the potential impacts of introducing them.
- ii) Forest transformation in Hesse would not be happening on such a large scale were it not for state support in the framework of EU financing. Transformation of monoculture forests in the southern Caucasus will also require state support.

3.3. Third session – Country reports

In the third session Hannes Neuner (Forestry Advisor, WWF Caucasus), Arthur Alaverdyan (Forestry Project Coordinator, WWF Armenia) and Elshad Askerov (Project Country Manager for Azerbaijan) gave presentations about measures carried out by the Project, the challenges experienced, and lessons learned so far in, respectively, Georgia (Presentation 4), Armenia (Presentation 5) and Azerbaijan (Presentation 6). Mr Neuner’s presentation included an overview of the relevance and applicability of forest transformation for the region.

The following points arose during the discussion:

- i) The Project was benefiting from WWF’s experience of different forest establishment techniques which has been applied in the three countries in a previous regional project.
- ii) Measures were being carried out in the pilot sites in accordance with forest transformation plans which the Project team prepared in the first half of 2012.

- iii) Fencing to exclude livestock so that they could not damage regeneration was essential at all of the pilot sites.
- iv) The Project was proving successful in engaging adjacent communities in the transformation measures.

3.4. Fourth session – Related projects in the region

In the fourth session the conference heard presentations on four projects that were connected with the management of natural resources in the region and the impacts of climate change on natural resources.

Regional Caucasus project on Community Forestry; EU/REC-Caucasus. Nune Harutyunyan, Executive Director of REC Caucasus gave a presentation on the project “Fostering Policies and Practices on Community forest management”. The objectives of the project had been to elaborate the institutional, legal and technical set-up for community forest management, to raise awareness of local communities and local authorities on sustainable forest management and to build the capacities, and to demonstrate best approaches/methods of immediate reforestation and landscape restoration in areas affected by land-slides, mudflows, avalanches and other natural disasters preventing measures. The project had succeeded in relation to all three objectives and had established a solid starting point from which to take further steps towards implementing community management of forests in the southern Caucasus.

Regional South Caucasus Project on Enhancing Local Capacity and Regional Cooperation on Climate Change Adaptation and Biodiversity Conservation; EU/Mercy Corps. Lika Margania of Mercy Corps presented the project. The objective of the project was to build the capacity of local authorities, improve communities’ capacity and enhance regional bilateral cooperation, to understand and to cope with the environmental, social and economic impacts of climate change in the South Caucasus. The project’s target locations were in the Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti Regions of Georgia, the Lori region of Armenia, and the Aghsa, Tovus, Shamkir and Samukh Rayons of Azerbaijan. The specific objective of the project was that the target communities develop and implement integrated disaster recovery relief and climate change adaptation action plans for the better prevention and management of risk and protection of livelihoods, local biodiversity and ecosystems.

Sustainable forest management programme for Tbilisi Municipality; GIZ/Tbilisi Municipality. Walter Benneckendorf, GIZ, described the actions that were being taken by Tbilisi City Council to implement sustainable forest management of the 12,000 hectares of forest which the national government had transferred into the Council’s care. The forest had been zoned according to four functions: protection forest; recreation forest; education forest; production forest. A forest management plan was being prepared that would pay full regard to the biodiversity, recreational and protective values of the forest as well as the economic value (the forest’s trees would be cut mainly for fuel wood). Guidelines covering the complete range of forest operations had been prepared. Forest guarding was performed by a private service company. Forest operations were planned by the Council’s forest management department and implemented by department staff or service companies. The capacity of the Council’s forest management department needed to be developed; there were plans to establish a training centre to that end.

Improvement of Biodiversity in Iori Mingeaur (Georgia, Azerbaijan) area; BMZ/BENGO/WWF. Ilia Osephashvili, WWF Caucasus, presented the project. The project

objective was the improvement of ecosystem biodiversity in the Iori-Mingechaur trans-boundary priority conservation area through floodplain forest rehabilitation, improved protected area and rangeland management, and reintroduction of the locally extinct goitered gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*). Project activities would include rehabilitation of the degraded floodplain (tugai) forest in Chachuna Sanctuary, Georgia, by means of:

- Restoration of natural flood regime by periodically releasing water from Dali dam (around 2,000 ha of forests will be rehabilitated)
- Planting, seeding and contributing to natural regeneration (about 50-60 ha of forest will be restored)
- Fencing of the sites restored through planting and seeding to protect them from grazing.

Mainly local villagers will be employed. Training will be provided to avoid accidents and increase the efficiency of work. Awareness-raising activities on the project will be regularly carried out among the workers and local population in general.

3.5. Fifth session – Final discussion and summing up

In final session the conference revisited points which had been raised earlier in the day and in particular about the impacts of the Project and the sustainability of the impacts. Summing up, Mr Garforth noted the following points:

- i) Climate change will have significant impacts on forest in the region and the negative impacts of climate change will almost certainly outweigh any positive impacts.
- ii) In the framework of the Project measures are being taken at a number of pilot sites to transform monoculture stands that are particularly susceptible to climate change into structurally diverse stands of mixed species.
- iii) Transformation measures – fencing, and planting, sowing, releasing natural regeneration and ancillary operations – are already well established at the Project's pilot sites.
- iv) The selection of the species and provenances which will be planted or sown in the process of forest transformation is very important. Future climate conditions need to be taken into account when deciding which species and provenances to use.
- v) As a general rule natural regeneration of native species should be nurtured because natural regeneration is a good indicator of the site's suitability for the species in question.
- vi) Grazing pressure needs to be managed to allow natural regeneration and to prevent damage to young trees. Forest managers need to engage with the people who depend on their livestock for their livelihoods and who have become accustomed to using forest stands for grazing.
- vii) In order that the impacts of forest transformation measures will be sustained, the seedlings that are established by the measures need to be tended. Projects such as the present project need to obtain reasonable guarantees from the owners of the forests in question regarding subsequent maintenance.

- viii) The subsequent development of sample stands in which transformation measures have been carried out needs to be monitored so that we can learn lessons and adapt our approaches to transformation accordingly.
- ix) In order to go beyond small scale pilot projects such as the present Project the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia need to elaborate and implement national strategies for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change on forests.

Conference Agenda

February 27, 2013

09:30-10:00	Registration of participants	
10:00-10:20	Welcoming	<i>Virginie Cossoul</i> <i>EU Delegation to Georgia</i> <i>Giorgi Sanadiradze</i> <i>Director WWF Caucasus</i>
10:20-10:30	Opening remarks and agenda	<i>Moderator Mike Garforth</i> <i>The Project International</i> <i>Forestry Consultant</i>
10:30-11:05	Introduction and overview of EU/WWF project <i>Presentation</i> <i>Questions and answers</i>	<i>Malkhaz Dzneldadze</i> <i>WWF Caucasus</i> <i>The Project Regional</i> <i>Coordinator</i>
11:05-11:25	<i>Coffee break</i>	
11:25-12:05	Overview of forest transformation in Germany (History, general approach, success stories, difficulties) <i>Presentation</i> <i>Questions and answers</i>	<i>Rolf Schulzke</i> <i>International Forestry Expert</i> <i>State Forestry Organization -</i> <i>Hessen-Forest, Germany</i>
12:05-12:50	Forest Adaptation strategy to climate change for the Southern Caucasus <i>Presentation</i> <i>Questions and answers</i>	<i>Mike Garforth</i> <i>The Project International</i> <i>Forestry Consultant</i>
12:50-14:00	<i>Lunch</i>	
14:00-14:40	Forest Transformation in the Southern Caucasus - Challenges and Opportunities (<i>including Country presentation Georgia</i>) <i>Presentation</i> <i>Questions and answers</i>	<i>Hannes Neuner</i> <i>The Project International</i> <i>Forestry Advisor</i> <i>WWF Caucasus</i>
14:40-15:05	Country presentation Armenia <i>Presentation</i> <i>Questions and answers</i>	<i>Arthur Alaverdyan,</i> <i>Forestry Projects'</i> <i>Coordinator, WWF Armenia</i>
15:05-15:25	Country presentation Azerbaijan <i>Presentation</i> <i>Questions and answers</i>	<i>Elshad Askerov</i> <i>The Project Country Manager</i> <i>in Azerbaijan</i> <i>WWF Azerbaijan</i>

15:25-15:45	<i>Coffee break</i>	
15:45-16:45	<p>Ongoing projects in Forestry/Climate Change Adaptation (10 minutes each)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU supported Regional Caucasus Project on Community Forestry (REC Caucasus) • EU supported Regional South Caucasus Project on Agrobiodiversity and Climate Adoption (REC Caucasus) • EU supported Regional South Caucasus Project on Enhancing Local Capacity and Regional Cooperation on Climate Change Adaptation and Biodiversity Conservation (Mercy Corps) • GIZ supported sustainable forest management programme for Tbilisi Municipality (GIZ/Tbilisi Municipality) • BMZ/BENGO/WWF supported project on improvement of Biodiversity in Iori Mingechaur (Georgia, Azerbaijan) area 	<p><i>Nune Harutyunyan Executive Director REC Caucasus</i></p> <p><i>Ana Rukhadze, REC Caucasus</i></p> <p><i>Lika Margania Mercy Corps</i></p> <p><i>Walter Benneckendorf GIZ</i></p> <p><i>Ilia Osepashvili WWF Caucasus</i></p>
16:45-17:15	General discussion	<i>Conference participants</i>
17:15-17:30	Lessons learnt, final conclusions, recommendations and follow up	<i>Mike Garforth The Project International Forestry Consultant</i>
17:30-18:00	Closure	

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Conference Photos



INCREASING THE RESILIENCE OF FOREST ECOSYSTEMS AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE SOUTHERN
CAUCASUS THROUGH FOREST TRANSFORMATION

Regional Conference
on Climate Change Impacts on Forests and Best Practice in Forest Transformation
in the South Caucasus Countries

Rustaveli Avenue 13, Tbilisi, Georgia, Marriot Tbilisi Hotel Tamar Mepe Conference Hall

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