

Integrated Biodiversity Management in the South Caucasus



Diversity for a better future

Commissioned by: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Partners: Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations in Armenia; environmental ministries in Azerbaijan and Georgia; other Government ministries; local authorities; non-governmental organisations; educational institutions
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◀ An example from the field – how we achieve results:

Current agricultural and livestock farming practices in the South Caucasus mean that heavy rainfall and winds cause severe soil erosion. This is exacerbated by the impact of climate change. The result is an irretrievable loss of productive arable land and pasture, leading to natural disasters and a rural exodus.

We are addressing this problem with our partners, which include the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (RECC). A manual on integrated erosion control in the South Caucasus documents practical and proven approaches and supports their wider dissemination. The approaches combine bioengineering measures designed to stabilise slopes and erosion gullies, with the introduction of sustainable pasture management and local afforestation. The countries of the South Caucasus address soil erosion by combining training with improved cooperation between the key stakeholders and the adaptation of development strategies and legislation.

◀ Challenges:

The local population, the private sector and government are currently exploiting natural resources in ways that place pressure on these resources. There is too little public awareness of the principles underlying the sustainable management of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Nor is such awareness mainstreamed within training institutions or made an integral part of planning and decision-making processes. This is compounded by conflicts of interest between the various sectors involved and land users, poor coordination, and a lack of robust data.

◀ Objectives:

We are developing strategies to support the sustainable management of biodiversity and ecosystem services across sectoral and administrative boundaries, based

on robust data. Through this approach, we are helping safeguard the species and habitat diversity for future generations.

◀ Activities:

We advise our partners on developing cross-sectoral policies, strategies and laws. We also support them in developing and establishing monitoring/inventory systems for forests, as well as biodiversity and ecosystem services, and facilitate inter-ministerial dialogue based on solid data. Here we are drawing on the lessons learned in pilot regions, where we have demonstrated how natural resources can be managed more sustainably and protected while taking diverse interests into account. The project is improving wider public awareness of the importance of biodiversity by supporting the capacity development of training institutions, conducting national campaigns and improving environmental education centres.

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Our contribution in Georgia

Diversity for a better future

Commissioned by: German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ),
Partners: Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection, Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Ministry of Education and Science, National Forestry Agency, the municipalities of Dedoplistskaro and Akhmeta in the Kakheti region.

◀ A country-specific example

The municipality of Akhmeta in north-eastern Georgia covers an area of 2,200 km², which also includes the mountain valleys of Tusheti. Working with the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, the project is supporting proper spatial and land-use planning for this region – a first in Georgia. Planning takes into account the diverse interests of the local population as well as the unique natural and cultural environment of this sensitive mountain region. Together with public agencies and the local population in the 75 villages (population 45,000), we are piloting proper forest management in accordance with European principles, the regulation of pasture management through the introduction of pasture rotation and bioengineering measures to manage erosion gullies that threaten entire villages. We are thus helping identify ways in which the diversity of landscapes and habitats, and animal and plant species, can be managed in order to guarantee sustainable development. Through initial and continuing training, GIZ is supporting the population, local non-governmental organisations and public institutions in taking initiatives, assuming ownership and at the same time preserving their centuries-old cultural landscape.

Results: →

Groundbreaking national biodiversity strategies and action plans in line with the obligations arising from the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity have been adopted. We are acting as partners in the practical implementation of these ambitious plans and their translation into legislation.

Using national environmental information systems, our partners are able to gather, analyse and communicate robust data based on recognised scientific methods.

Exchange and dialogue are taking place between decision-makers and experts in the three countries on urgent environmental issues of cross-border significance, such as the sustainable management of ecosystem services and effective environmental policy-making.

Preconditions are being established to apply principles of sustainable forest management, modern forest planning methods and satellite-based forest monitoring systems, potentially improving the management of approximately 35,000 km² of forest in the South Caucasus (an area roughly the size of the German federal state of Baden-Württemberg).

Thanks to improved cropping methods and agrobiodiversity management, agriculture is now able to adapt to climate change. More than 3,000 farmers already apply these approaches.

Environmental education campaigns and environmental education in schools are improving public awareness, attitudes and behavior with regard to environmental issues. We regularly measure this improvement by conducting opinion surveys across the South Caucasus region.

◀ Demonstrating sustainable biodiversity management in pilot regions

- » In Dedoplistskaro, we are introducing farming methods that nurture biodiversity and are adapted to the impacts of climate change. Yields have increased by 100%.
- » In Akhmeta, we are piloting new spatial planning methods, ecosystem-based sustainable forest and pasture management, and integrated erosion control.

◀ Improving frameworks and supporting capacity development

- » We are advising our partners on establishing sound biodiversity and forest monitoring/inventory systems that will enable decision-makers to take informed policy decisions based on robust data. For that reason, we are supporting the conduct of the first National Forest Inventory.
- » We are facilitating implementation of the EU Association Agreement by drafting a framework law on biodiversity. We are supporting the establishment of an Emerald Network of sensitive regions (similar to Natura 2000 in the EU).
- » We are advising on comprehensive reform of the forestry sector. Over 250 stakeholders from 70

organisations are involved in the National Forest Programme (NFP) process. We are supporting the introduction of training for forest workers in vocational schools and in higher education in environmental studies (in cooperation with the German Academic Exchange Service, DAAD).

◀ Education for sustainable development

- » We are helping to improve the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of the wider public with regard to ecosystem services and biodiversity.
- » We are advising on the development and implementation of cross-curricular national standards for education for sustainable development for students (in years 1 to 12).
- » Sustainable biodiversity management is being put into practice in 250 eco-clubs in secondary schools.

◀ Regional exchange and dialogue

- » In Georgia, representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia attend conferences and meetings to share and dialogue on urgent environmental issues in the region, e.g. integrating ecosystem services into development planning, or establishment of Man-and-Biosphere Area (UNESCO Man-and-Biosphere programme).
- » In cooperation with RECC, we have created a regional platform that will support long-term virtual exchange and dialogue.



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