

REC Caucasus Georgia Newsletter on FCFPP and ISUNR Projects

Issue N°1

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IN FOCUS

> During the centuries forests were existential basis for human activities. As well as in other regions, in the Caucasus forests and particularly ones located close to populated areas had two main functions: economic and cultural/spiritual. Despite modern technologic development, changes in legislations, and forest management schemes during the last century, forests continue to have two main abovementioned functions for local population, especially in the mountain regions of the Caucasus.

Unfortunately, many forests in the Caucasus which are used by rural communities have been, and are continuing to be degraded. Involving communities in the forest management can help to address these problems.

The term “Community Forestry” means involving the population living in and around forests in management planning, utilization, protection and maintenance of forest with the aims that the population will benefit from the products and services provided by forests and that forests will be sustainably managed.

Environmental projects on “Fostering Community Forest Policy and Practice in Mountain Regions of the Caucasus” and “Introduce Practice of Sustainable Use of Natural Resources in Local Communities and Increase Preparedness Against Natural Disasters” implemented by REC Caucasus, focus on development of new institutional, legal and technical set-up for community forest management. In particular, the project supports secured land tenure and forest rights of local communities, implementation of institutional arrangements and land use



policies for forest conservation and sustainable use. Also, support awareness raising activities among local communities and local authorities on sustainable forest management and natural disasters, its relation and impact on other fields such as climate change, poverty reduction and sustainable development. Immediate reforestation measures under the project can solve problems such as land-slides, mudflows, avalanches and protect populated areas from natural disasters.

The overall objectives of the actions are to foster community forest policy and practice in mountain regions of the Caucasus, as well as select best approaches to forest and pasture renovation, which have been damaged due to natural disasters.

Both of the projects aim to respond to current demands of the three south Caucasus countries in elaboration of relevant institutional, legal and technical set-up for community forest management, awareness raising and capacity building of local communities and local authorities on sustainable forest management and demonstration

of best approaches/methods of immediate reforestation and landscape restoration.

In this issue:

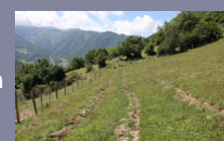
Celebration of the World Forest Day



Reforestation Activities in Gheb, Tchiora and Glola villages

Field Visits in Racha

Landscape Restoration Activities



Public Awareness Activities

Exhibition of Children's Paintings



The projects are funded by the European Union and Eurasia Partnership Foundation



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Celebration of the World Forest Day

By arranging Round Table Meeting in Sheraton Metechi Palace Hotel, Tbilisi, REC Caucasus joined those 100 countries which are celebrating World Forest Day on March 21.



A Representative of the Georgian Scientific sector and Professor of the Agrarian University of Georgia, who attended the meeting, made analysis of current forest legislation system and burdens which Georgia faces today in regard with forest management. He estimated economic values of the forest resources of Georgia with the particular attention to incomplete data on forest sector, overuse of timber resources for logging, or livelihood, high index of unpermitted cut & logging, also mentioned problems related to the precise registration of the unpermitted cut and shared worldwide experience in forest management and tendencies.



He clarified, that currently there doesn't State Policy on forest, as well as forest restoration state programs. The issue is enhanced by lack of public participation in decision-making process at the local level.



World Forestry Day has been celebrated around the world for 30 years to remind communities of the importance of forests and the many benefits which we gain from them. The concept of having a World Forestry Day originated at the 23rd General Assembly of the European Confederation of Agriculture in 1971. Later that year, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) gave support to the idea believing the event would contribute a great deal to public awareness of the importance of forests and agreed that it should be observed every year on March 21 around the world.

As underlined during the meeting, the main objective of the World Forestry Day is to raise awareness about the importance of forest ecosystems, their protection, regeneration, and recovery. Processes of forest loss and degradation have become international issues that require joint decision by all countries of the world.



Reforestation Activities in Gheb, Tchiora and Glola

In regard with frequent natural disasters taking place in recent years related to sensitive geological environment and complicated climate conditions, REC Caucasus reached agreement with Eurasia Partnership Foundation through project "Introduce Practice of Sustainable Use of Natural Resources in Local Communities and Increase Preparedness Against Natural Disasters".



The aim of the aforementioned project is to enhance resistance of local communities against natural disasters through their sustainable use of natural resources.

Within the framework of abovementioned 9 month project, maps were developed, as well as disaster risk assessment and awareness raising activities conducted for better informed local communities in three high-mountainous villages of Georgia – Gheb, Tchiora and Glola.



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During the project implementation, taking into account disaster risk factors, erosive plateaus have been reforested as well: natural renovation of 6 Ha of forests has been supported, and 1 Ha of forest renovated.



In cooperation with Ltd NERGEBI successfully completed the planned activities in particular marking and fencing 77 Ha territories, soil preparation, brushing forest lands, ploughing lands for both, the natural reforestation and afforestation.



Field Visits in Racha

REC Caucasus team visited Racha region recently. The meetings held during the visit were attended by representatives of both community members and local authorities of villages Chiora, Ghlola and Ghebi.

The meeting aimed to introduce the activities planned within the framework of the project and select the land areas for forest landscape restoration. Representatives of local authorities and community members also discussed issues regarding forthcoming trainings.

As a result of joint efforts, the local population, together with REC Caucasus team selected 73 ha forest land for reforestation activities, which consists of both 66 ha territory as the land funded by the EU project and 7 ha as the one funded by Eurasia Partnership Foundation for restoration activities. Population of pilot villages expressed their commitment to take part in reforestation activities, which is crucial for increasing civic participation of local people in forest rehabilitation processes in the pilot regions.



REC Caucasus has also created other beneficial opportunities for rural farmers in order to improve and enrich cattle feed. In the rehabilitation process, reforested areas have been fenced to protect tree plants from impacts of external factors, such as grazing, floods etc. In newly ploughed and planted soils, large amounts of grass began to grow, especially in the territories near fences.

Landscape Restoration Activities

U.S. Forest Service experts and REC Caucasus project team conducted joint monitoring of forest landscape rehabilitation activities, implemented in the frames of REC Caucasus two projects.



During the monitoring mission, experts visited sites in the high-mountain villages of Gebi and Chiora, where forestation activities were going on 4,3 Ha, and new selected territories, affected by erosion in Utsera village of Racha region, as well as natural regeneration of 63 ha forest territories in the same villages. Within the visit, RECC's project team and U.S. Forest Service experts met with the Georgian President's Attorney in Racha, Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti Region.



The process of forest landscape rehabilitation was continued with supervene of the U.S. Forest Service experts. The field visit was followed by the detailed discussions and experience sharing stakeholder workshop with U.S. Forest Service experts in the building of the Ministry of Environment Protection in Georgia, where recommendations on new methodologies in forestry rehabilitation and forest management issues were discussed.



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Public Awareness Activities

As the part of visibility actions, within the framework of the FCFPP project, various information brochures and publications have been developed by four participating countries, including the Regional Guideline for Community Forest Management.



Branch offices of REC Caucasus were actively engaged in development of awareness raising materials on project implementation, such as CDs, pamphlets and video films, which were distributed to target groups during the national meetings and events such as “International Forest Day”, “Environment Day” and “Earth Day” implemented by RECC Armenia. More than 2000 copies of booklets, 200 copies of CD info packages, 1000 copies of info-sheets and 1000 copies of info folders have been spread out during the community meetings, workshops, seminars and trainings conducted by REC Caucasus within FCFPP project.



Relevant publications for awareness raising purposes were distributed in local communities as well as to community councils, villagers, foresters including Textbook “Recommendations on Social Aspects of Forest Certification using FSC Scheme”, Journal “Sustainable Forest Management” (WWF publisher) with relevant articles of project experts, educational booklet and educational video film “Forest I live in: What is sustainable forest management” (DVD).

Exhibition of Children’s Paintings



Children’s paintings exhibition was organized on the occasion of the World Environment Day together with the Ministry of Environment Protection of Georgia, TBC Bank and Wissol Petroleum in Tbilisi. Authors of three best paintings within the Child Painting exhibition, were granted with the cash bonus vouchers instituted by the TBC Bank. Also, 12 best young artists were awarded with one year valid ticket to Anaklia Reserve.



Mr. Goga Khachidze, the Minister of Environment Protection of Georgia opened the exhibition and highly appraised children’s paintings not only for their artistic skills, but also for their vision and feelings on how to take care and protect the nature.

Legal Analysis of Community Forestry Issues

Legal analysis of the existing Forestry related legislation has been recently developed.

The International Expert elaborated a review based on the country analyses of legislation, visits to the pilot areas and discussions with project staff and stakeholders. The FCFPP project team carried out legal analyses of forest and land laws and regulations at national levels, as well as packages of relevant amendments to existing national legislations and regional model guideline for development of community forest management plans were elaborated and will be presented in the following issue of the newsletter.

REC CAUCASUS HEAD OFFICE IN TBILISI, GEORGIA

23, Chavchavadze Ave. , 2nd floor
0179 Tbilisi, Georgia
Tel: +995 32 2253649/+995 32 2253648; Fax: +995 32 2916352
Web site: www.rec-caucasus.org
E-Mail: info@rec-caucasus.org

