

Project Experts Meet with Local Authorities and Farmers



Since October, the project experts have been carrying out the meetings with local authorities and farmers of pilot regions in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The aim of the meetings is to provide observation of arid and semi-arid eco-systems in the region, conduct field inventories, meet with relevant state authorities in target areas and exchange of views on those communities, where natural ecosystems are the most exposed to climate change.

During the meetings with representatives of local authorities and community residents, project staff and specialists has provided detailed information on purpose and objectives of the project. Local community members have been informed on current status of the project and future steps. Main discussed issues were current situation in agriculture, main profitable sectors, traditional agricultural activities, mostly used species, any adaptive measures taken against climate change impacts and the level of knowledge of local farmers related to impact of climate change to agro-biodiversity.



As the main initial observation, low level of awareness of local authorities and local communities about negative impact of climate change on agro-biodiversity and adaptive measures must be mentioned. Notwithstanding that local farmers experience negative impacts of climate change in terms of decreasing productivity of some varieties and drought cases, changes in vegetation periods and increase of plants diseases, they do not have enough information on future consequences of the process. This case indicates the importance of awareness raising activities to be provided under the project.

Representatives of local authorities appreciated the project initiative and have expressed their great interest to co-operation with the project. They noted importance of project activities for the socio-economical life of the districts and provide project experts with advises for selection of most vulnerable communities and possible adaptation measures.

At this point, the project experts in three countries continue further activities in selected project administrative regions to provide in-depth analyses and select most vulnerable communities for implementation of adaptation measures.

Experts coordination meeting

On December 13, 2011, in German House, Tbilisi, was organized the regional coordination meeting within the framework of the project. Team leaders, project experts in fields of climate change and agrobiodiversity as well as ecologists from all three South Caucasus countries and an international expert were attending the meeting.

Team leaders have presented overview of implemented activities and future plans within the project. National experts presented main findings regarding field inventories of agro biodiversity. It was mentioned by experts that different plants may be priority for different regions. For example in Georgia and Azerbaijan grain-crops and grapes were chosen as priority plants, while in Armenia main attention was given to crop wild relatives. Government support in selection process should be ensured as well – selected agricultural crops should be important for the region and its agriculture. The attendees also underlined the importance of obtaining information from local farmers, who are witnessing changes in agricultural productivity and product quality, which are analyzed and compared to statistical and literature data.

After national experts review, international expert made his presentation, regarding possible methodologies for vulnerability assessment and identification of priority species, offering different approaches to project implementation.

All the participants agreed that adaptation measures must be oriented on preserving biodiversity of agricultural crops. Wild relatives and other species, however, can be used as indicators for climate change.

Countries discussed their approaches and methods for assessing climate change and making future forecasts as well.

By the end of the meeting recommendations were regarding further advancement of cooperation and exchange of information, knowledge and experience as part of effective organizational communication between experts at the regional level, in order to sustain teamwork, unity and successful implementation of the project.



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IN FOCUS

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Conservation of Agrobiodiversity in the light of Climate change in South Caucasus Countries

The Caucasus Region is exceptional for its agricultural species and a large variety of its wild relatives. Preservation of existing agrobiodiversity has a great importance for agricultural sustainability and the welfare of local community. This has become especially noticeable since climate change. Because of the climate change impacts, the serious decrease of agrobiodiversity in arid and semi-arid ecosystems is expected, the vulnerability of which is confirmed by the number of studies in all three South Caucasus countries.

The Project "Identification and implementation of adaptation response to Climate Change impact for Conservation and Sustainable use of agro-biodiversity in arid and semi-arid ecosystems of South Caucasus" was started to address policy and institutional issues in the South Caucasus countries as well as pilot the activities in selected rural communities located in arid and semi-arid geographical areas, to promote community based sustainable practices for agro-biodiversity use and conservation to reduce risk of climate change impacts that benefit both the rural population and the environment.

The objective of the project is to build adaptive capacities in the South Caucasus countries to ensure resilience of agro-biodiversity of especially vulnerable arid and semi-arid ecosystems and local livelihoods to climate change.

In order to achieve its objective, the project includes the following activities:

- Clarifying of major threats to agro biodiversity in arid and semi-arid ecosystems posed by climate change, development of vulnerability profiles for agro resources as well as identification and implementation of pilot projects on adaptation targeted to increase of ecosystem resilience and to reduce risk for food production in six selected communities of South Caucasus countries.
- Revision of regulatory framework and conduction of gap analysis of the regional/local development strategies and plans related to conservation of biodiversity and agriculture in light of climate change aspect. Based on analysis conducted set of measures to promote adaptation to climate change and conservation of agro-biodiversity will be defined and include into local development plans.
- Awareness campaigns to make local population aware about importance of agro-biodiversity conservation and climate change impact related problems. Educational module for schoolchildren to conduct public ecosystem monitoring for assessing climate change risk will be developed and introduced.
- Revision of existing institutional capacities at national/local levels to mainstream agro-biodiversity and climate change adaptation issues into development policies and plans. Series of training programmes for decision makers and local population on value of agro-biodiversity and sustainable agricultural practices to reduce climate change risk will be organized.

The project has the regional scope and is implemented by RECC in all three South Caucasus Countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) with the financial support of European Union. The project is co-financed by German International Cooperation Society (GIZ). The project started in March 2011 and will continue until 2014.



Regional Inception Conference



On 1st of July, 2011, The Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus organized the regional inception conference in the framework of the Project "Identification and Implementation of Adaptation Response to Climate Change Impact for Conservation and Sustainable Use of Agro-biodiversity in Arid and Semi-arid Ecosystems of South Caucasus" was organized in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Aim of the conference was to present the Project objectives and outputs to major stakeholders and interested parties, to discuss the relevance of the project activities to national and regional needs and conduct necessary adjustments, to discuss implementation modalities and approve project annual work plan.

More than 40 participants from three South Caucasus countries of the region attended the Regional Conference. Representatives of governmental entities, including National focal points for UNFCCC and UNCBD, project implementing team, other related stakeholders from academic institutions, non-governmental sectors and international organizations participated to the event.

Representatives from Armenia and Azerbaijan presented country's profile with regard to agro-biodiversity conservation and policy, as well as on-going information on Climate change activities.

Information on regional initiatives related to climate change was presented by representatives of international organizations. Ms. Darejan Kapanadze (World Bank) informed participants on new upcoming regional study on climate change impact and some sector related upcoming activities. Ms. Nino Antadze (UNDP) shared the outputs of recently completed Regional Climate Change Study Results imple-

mented within the frame of Environment and Security initiatives. Mr. Malkhaz Dzneladze (WWF Caucasus programme office) shared objectives of new regional project on climate change mitigation through restoration of forest landscape. In addition GIZ regional office presented their experience in implementation of Sustainable management of biodiversity programme, as well as presented outline of the second phase of the Regional Programme of the German government in the South Caucasus on Biodiversity.

Major issues discussed by participants of the conference were related to clarification of terminology, identification of criteria for selection of pilot areas, how the project activities need to be linked with population's needs. Aspect on protection and use of local genetic resources and local varieties was emphasized. Necessity of use traditional agricultural practices in combination of modern copying methodology was discussed.

In order to ensure similar understanding of the scope of the project it was decided that project team should come up with the list of unified terminology applicable for all countries for selection of territories and ecosystems. It was recommended to elaborate and agree regional criteria for selection of target ecosystems and related communities. Apart of criteria a unified methodology need to be elaborated and applied in all three countries to conduct vulnerability assessment of ecosystems and get comparable and reliable data and results. Finally, updated project work plan was approved by conference participants.

Organization of Steering Committees Meetings

Inter-ministerial Steering Committees have been established in each of South Caucasus countries to provide political oversight for the project as well as general advice for project implementation policy ensuring the project's consistency with the other ongoing development processes in the countries. The national steering committee members include representatives of Ministries of Environment and Agriculture, other related ministries, National Parliaments, NGOs, research institutions and international organisations.

Starting from September branch offices of REC Caucasus in Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as in Georgia arranged Steering Committee meetings the purpose of which was to introduce project aim, activities and expected results, adoption of work plans and regional criteria for identification of areas for project intervention.



Despite some contradictions regarding the regional criteria for selecting tentative areas for project intervention, after active discussions and negotiations Steering Committee members finally came to the conclusion in this regard both in Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as in Georgia. Ararat and Vayots Dzor Regions in Armenia and Gobustan, Shamakhi and Agsu administrative districts in Azerbaijan were approved by Steering committees as project target regions. Based on further vulnerability assessments and in-depth analysis most vulnerable communities will be identified as a pilot communities for implementation of adaptation measures.

The importance of sharing information on Project implementation and lessons learned between the three countries was also emphasized during the meetings. The main and significant recommendation was that project should not be apart from current interventions and programs in country and South Caucasus region, since it's the only unique project on Agro-biodiversity conservation and the outcomes of the project will be very important to be invested in the projects engaged in the field of Climate change impact adaptation and mitigation.

It was underlined by steering committee members that in order to achieve real influence, it is necessary to maintain intensive consultations with governmental sector and follow their recommendations. According to the Programme manager of EU, Mr. Michelle Jambou, one of the key goals of the Project is to fill up the existing gaps in the legislation and for this purpose the Project should prepare the information that will be supported by relevant surveys/studies and provide it to governmental agencies. For this purpose the Project shall prepare the information that will be supported by relevant surveys/studies and provide it to governmental agencies. The information will help them in the implementation of relevant changes.



Consultation meeting with project stakeholders in Georgia

On October 18, 2011, during the Consultation meeting with the project stakeholders municipalities of Gori, Gardabani, Sagarejo and Dedoplistskaro were selected as pilot regions for assessing agrobiodiversity vulnerability. The attendees of the meeting included representatives of the State Universities, Hydrometeorology and Agriculture Institutions, as well as Agro ecological Community, WWF-Caucasus Programme Office and the Biological Farming Association "Elkana".

It was recommended by the experts to focus project researches on priority species important for agricultural development, in particular wheat and vine and especially the local breeds. Crop wild relatives should be assessed as well, as the main component for agrobiodiversity. According to experts, for reveal impact of climate change, it will be important to research the natural background (current vegetation changes).

