

Draft Report

Evaluation of ECF Start-up Phase



October 2019

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Content

Executive Summary	6
1 Introduction.....	10
1.1 Background and objective of the evaluation	10
1.2 Scope of the evaluation, focus topics and deliverables	10
2 Evaluation Methodology	11
3 Evaluation Findings.....	12
3.1 Contribution to Overall Objective	12
3.2 Relevance	14
3.3 Effectiveness.....	16
3.4 Efficiency	19
3.4.1 Output Area 1	19
3.4.2 Output Area 2	22
3.4.3 Output Area 3	24
3.4.4 Output Area 4	27
3.5 Sustainability	30
4 Lessons Learned and Recommendations	32
4.1 Cross Cutting Issues (Gender, Climate Change, Biodiversity/Ecosystem Services, ESMF)....	32
4.1.1 Gender	32
4.1.2 Climate Change.....	34
4.1.3 Biodiversity Conservation Financing / Eco-System Services	34
4.1.4 Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF).....	35
4.2 Name of the Eco-Corridors -Programme.....	35
4.3 General KfW approach	35
4.4 Institutional Set-up WWF and community orientation.....	36
4.5 Monitoring and Evaluation.....	37
4.6 Human Wildlife Conflicts (HWC) and mitigation measures	39
4.7 Future Area Selection & Legal Status	40
4.8 Cooperation with other programmes	41

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

4.8.1	Cooperation with WWF-Germany.....	41
4.8.2	Cooperation with other funding agencies.....	41
4.8.3	Cooperation with other conservation organizations	41
4.8.4	Cooperation with CNF/SPPA/TJS.....	41
5	Conclusion	46

Figures

Figure 1: Evaluation Methodology	11
----------------------------------------	----

Tables

Table 1: Overview of ECF Conservation Agreements.....	27
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Abbreviations

AMD	Armenian Dram (currency)
AZN	Azerbaijan New Manat (currency)
CA	Conservation Agreement
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCA	Community Conservation Area
CNF	Caucasus Nature Fund
CTA	Chief Technical Advisor
CU	Community Union
ECF	Eco-regional Corridor Fund
ECP	Eco regional Conservation Plan
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro (currency)
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FBC	Fund for Biodiversity Conservation in the Armenian Highland, Ararat
FPA	Financial Participatory Approach
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
GEL	Georgian Lari (currency)
GIS	Geographic Information System
HWC	Human Wildlife Conflicts
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
NC	National Coordinator
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NTFP	Non Timber Forest Products
PL	Protected Landscape (IUCN Cat 5)
SDA	Strategic Development Agency NGO / Armenia
SDC	Swiss Development Agency
SPPA	Support Programme for Protected Areas
tbd	to be determined
TEEB	The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity
TJS	Trans boundary Joint Secretariat
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature - Caucasus Programme Office

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

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& the local evaluators Rubina Devrikyan, Nuraddin Eynullayev and Gia Sopadze

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Executive Summary

Title and purpose of the study: Evaluation of the start-up phase of the ECF by an international consultant and local specialists in each of the three countries to provide an external perspective and support to WWF and the consulting team.
Date of Evaluation: September - October 2019
Project Overview
Name of Programme: Eco-Corridors Programme in the Southern Caucasus
Country/Region: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia / South Caucasus
Implementation Setup: The programme is implemented by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Caucasus Programme Office with funds provided by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through KfW Development Bank and by WWF Germany. The consortium of GOPA Consultants, DFS and HessenForst are providing consulting services for implementation.
Project Budget and duration: 8.3 Mio Euro / Jan. 2015 - Feb. 2020
Project Objective and Outcome as stated in the Logframe Matrix: <p>The objective of ECF is to contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity without reducing the income of the local rural population. This will be achieved through long term "Conservation Agreements" that will be concluded with those managing the land (community representatives/municipalities - CBOs) and will be based on land use plans (meaning specific plans for management of natural resources such as forests, wildlife or pastures, or more general conservation or urban plans, depending on the needs identified in specific target communities) developed with the participation of the beneficiaries.</p>
Project Description: The project is based on two parallel and interlinked processes <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.) scientific identification and prioritization of critical eco-corridors and target species, through analysis of environmental variables (habitat suitability, wildlife migration patterns, existing Protected Area mapping etc.) and identification of social variables (human pressure and land use) resulting in proposed conservation areas with clear categories of protection and use zones, and2.) participatory, community based approaches (Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)+Financial Participatory Approach (FPA)) to develop trust, awareness, ownership and motivation for sustainable livelihood activities and long-term commitment for protection of the prioritized areas through conservation agreements implemented over a period of 10 years.
Outputs: The four output areas according to the log-frame are 1. Setting-up of the ECF; 2. Land Use planning; 3. Negotiation and implementation of conservation measures (Conservation Agreements) and 4. Fundraising for ECF.
Evaluation Methodology
The evaluation methodology is structured by the DAC-criteria (Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability) applied on the programme approach. The focus of the evaluation was on the conception and effective implementation of programme activities and the institutional set-up as

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well as the sustainability of project results. Further attention was paid to the cross-cutting issues of gender, climate change and Environmental & Social Management. The methodological mix included assessment of quantitative and qualitative data with a strong focus on key-stakeholder perspectives.

The document is based on the analysis of project documents and presentations and key-stakeholder meetings and beneficiary interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) as well as informal discussions with the project staff during two field missions and site visits, the first in May 2019 to Tbilisi (Monitoring and Evaluation Workshop) and the second in September 2019 to the project areas in all three countries. (see detailed agenda, photo-documentation and list of meetings in Annex). The evaluation report is complemented by individual case studies for each country. The wealth of information contained in the interview summaries/minutes of meetings (MoMs) could only partly be covered by the report. It is highly recommended to read the success stories (Annex) and the selection of MoMs (Annex) for the specific insights and opinions shared by the stakeholders.

Evaluation Findings

Contribution to Overall Objective: The programme outputs and the corresponding activities are coherent with the objectives and relevant to address the core problems. The programme has set-up a structure of ECF- savings accounts, identified and selected relevant areas through habitat analysis and land use planning for the conservation target as well as to interested communities/CBOs.

In all three countries the programme has been successfully implemented with national adaptations, which enrich the scope for lessons learned from the different experiences. In total, 19 CAs have been signed: 6 in Armenia, 3 in Azerbaijan, 10 in Georgia (1 of them still in process in AZ) covering more than 75'000 ha of land and including more than 23'000 ha of 'core zone' with stricter protection regime (no hunting, no grazing). For all areas, specific habitat management, conservation and socio-economic development measures were defined in the menu of measures as eligible activities and included in the CA.

The approach contributes to the overall objective through empowerment and delegation of responsibility to the communities and supports them through awareness creation and contractual commitment to keep up the engagement for protection of the designated areas and target species in the long-term.

This evaluation is performed after (almost) completion of the 5 years programme "ECF-set-up period", while the ECF CA implementation continues for another 6-9 years. The success and sustainability of the CA implementation can therefore not be assessed yet.

Relevance: A crucial aspect for the relevance of the programme is that the communities have been assigned a real protagonist role for Nature Conservation based on ownership in ECF. In this regard, the programme has created a base of valuable practical experiences. Building up on its innovative character, the programme has the potential for further development based on lessons learned, extension to new communities/corridors, shaping national policies, as well as international replication/adaptation of community involvement approaches in Nature Conservation.

Effectiveness: According to stakeholders one of the biggest strengths of the project is in the effective process to engage local communities for long-term conservation and for their own socio-economic benefits ("win-win situations") not via classic grants but through a performance based system and payments for eco-system services. For the community facilitation, local NGOs and individual facilitators were contracted and an impressive number of trainings was conducted. The award based Financial Participatory Approach (FPA) was adapted to the project context with the objective to draw attention to environmental topics, reveal local knowledge and create positive attitudes as well as to build trust with the community members. This was done through a

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Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

competitive approach with small cash awards and local jury decisions, including story-telling, picture drawing and self-determined business- and community priority projects. The approach resulted in raised self-confidence, increased ownership and readiness for own contributions as well as to gain experience with community decision making and implementation of own priorities.

The results of the FPA approach were then used to determine which communities would be able and willing to commit themselves for a subsequent long-term conservation agreement (CA). The participatory approach has also increased the awareness for conservation needs and motivated the community support for designation of the conservation areas and for the controlling and awareness raising tasks of the care-takers, who are from the communities.

Efficiency: In terms of input-output-relation the project has been efficiently implemented. The output areas (1-4) are assessed to be achieved, the ECF fund was set-up as a savings account structure (objective 1) and a relocation of funds from the development of land use plans (output 2) to the implementation of the conservation agreements (output 3) has been made thus increasing the community benefits. Within the budget an impressive amount of community facilitation tasks and trainings was achieved. The acquisition of additional funds for the ECF (output 4) is achieved in terms of co-financing amount, but not directly as a sustainable ECF fund structure. The achievements in directly and indirectly leveraging additional co-funding or government support were higher than initially expected. With the increase of further co-financing arrangements and the involvement of different donors there is a need for intensive coordination and a need to carefully assess financial management and absorption capacities in the project communities in order not to create confusion and not to blur the project's conservation objectives. All adaptations in agreements and allocations of funds should be extremely well documented to avoid future misunderstandings. A sensitive backstopping and ongoing partnership with the CBOs is recommended.

Sustainability: The crucial sustainability question in the case of ECF is if the processes and the awareness created for community conservation will be strong enough to continue after the 10-year implementation period of the CAs. However, ten years are a long time and many unexpected changes can happen in a quickly developing and to some extent volatile region. The evaluation can thus only collect a few indicators from the present situation that would allow a forecast into the future and suggest activities that could further strengthen a sustainable process.

The stakeholder predictions of sustainability of the CAs were very interesting and controversial. Overall, scepticism about sustainable impacts of the project was highest among institutions & stakeholders where the trust in communities is lowest and where the disillusion of decentralisation & community involvement progress in government institutions is biggest. In contrast, at community level, the satisfaction with the achievements is high and the motivation is strong to continue even after the end of the CA funding period (at least among the community members involved in the process). The successful ECF communities feel that their world is changing for the better and the "Yes we can" factor is palpable.

There is now the opportunity to build upon the positive results and the huge effort in community motivation and facilitation which the ECF-programme has achieved. The institutional ties with local and national administrations can be strengthened, community mediation processes can be supported, community institutions democratically developed and resilience against political instrumentalization improved. The community development process within the ECF-Conservation Agreements (CAs) should be actively managed in partnership with the CBOs, not only the compliance with the CAs monitored. The active community members should not feel left alone but have someone to ask questions to and get appreciation for good results from. This will be relevant for the sustainability of the programme results as well as for the significance as a model for successful, community based, contractual Nature Conservation.

Cross-Cutting Issues: Gender aspects, climate change & biodiversity financing, and environmental &

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Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

social management (ESMF) were considered as inherent in the programme approach and with a high level of awareness within the project team. However the aspects were not systematically covered and there is scope for inclusion in a second phase as much in extension to new areas in the existing project communities.

Conclusion: The evaluation has looked at the 5 years' set-up period of the Eco-Corridors Programme. Based on the planned approach (logframe, workplans, assumptions) the impacts of the implemented or contracted measures and the contribution to the general objectives were analysed.

The evaluation findings were structured according to the DAC criteria (Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability). Cross-Cutting Issues (Gender, Climate Change, ESMF). Also institutional set-up and management structures as well as cooperation arrangements with other conservation organizations/programmes were examined.

Overall the programme (set-up phase) is considered to be a successful, innovative and relevant programme by stakeholders of all categories. One of the biggest strengths of the project is in the successful process to engage local communities. With a ten years implementation period of the conservation agreements yet to come, an assessment of outcome and impact indicators and sustainability of the conservation agreements would be premature at this stage. Stakeholders are very committed at present and in several aspects a further partnership is recommended even beyond the objectives of the conservation agreements.

In view of a future continuation and scaling-up of the programme, lessons learned were gathered. A list with strategic, methodological and technical recommendations is provided. A new phase of the programme should not only focus on new areas, but also continue to work with the existing communities. There is a lot of scope to build upon the enthusiasm in the communities for further activities that are combining environmental and socio-economic benefits (Climate change adaptation, alternative energy, natural resource regeneration etc.). The nexus of environmental and social benefits in small scale community projects could be further increased through clear 'environmental' theme setting (in the menu of socio-economic measures). There is also a lot of scope for documentation and dissemination of experiences as well as for capacity building of local conservation experts in all aspects of community facilitation and for further empowerment of local stakeholders.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and objective of the evaluation

The “Eco-corridors Programme in the Southern Caucasus” is implemented in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Caucasus Programme Office with funds provided by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through KfW Development Bank. The consortium of GOPA Consultants, DFS and HessenForst are providing consulting services for implementation.

The evaluation has the objective to assess the start-up phase of the Ecoregional Corridor Fund (ECF) in the South Caucasus. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide external perspective and support to WWF and the consulting team. The evaluation team is composed of an international specialist and a local specialist in each of the three implementation countries.

1.2 Scope of the evaluation, focus topics and deliverables

The Scope of the evaluation comprises the following tasks, topics and deliverables:

Task for the Evaluation

- Assess the impact of the measures implemented and/or contracted,
- Elaborate recommendations for the long-term perspective of the ECF to be presented in the final project report.

Main Focus Topics

- Institutional Setup => Management structures and Capacity Building
- Approaches & Methodologies => Successes and Challenges
- Community Level => Activities, institutions and beneficiary perspectives
- Scaling-up & mobilization of additional resources => lessons learned and dissemination

Deliverables

- Evaluation Report (engl.)
- Case Studies (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia) (in engl. + local language)
- Supporting Documents in Annex

2 Evaluation Methodology

The methodology for the evaluation was presented and discussed during the inception workshop and can be visualized in the following schema:

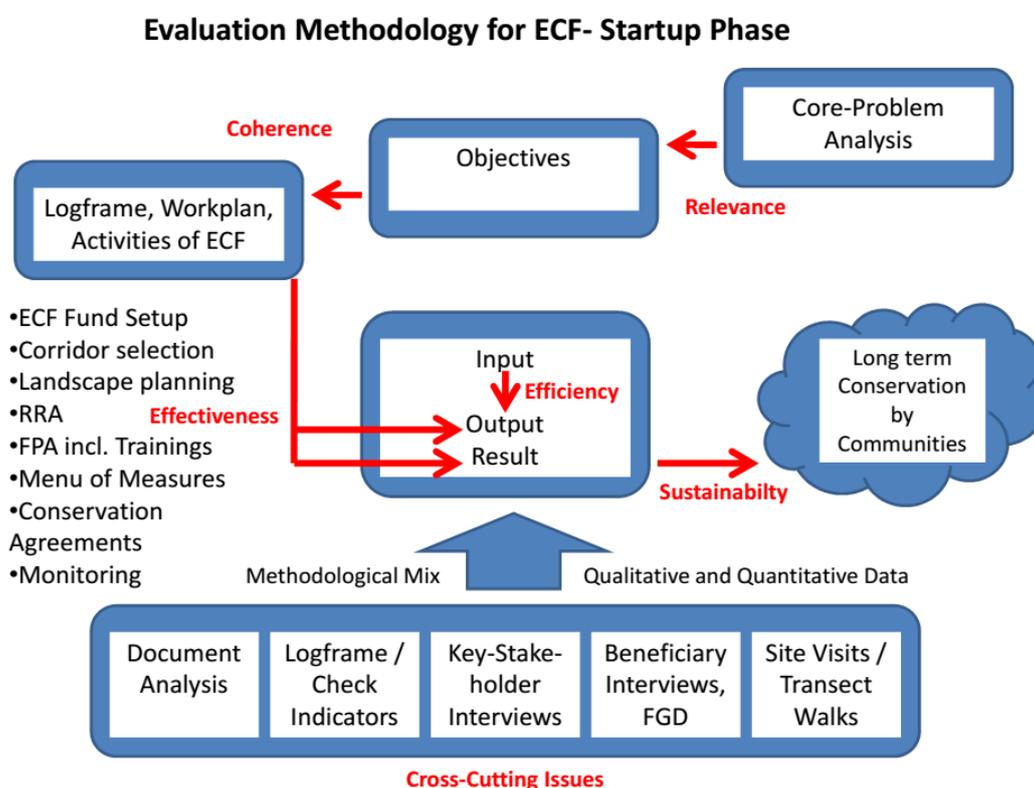


Figure 1: Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation methodology is structured by the DAC criteria applied on the programme approach. The core of the evaluation will be on the conception and effective implementation of project activities and the institutional set-up as well as the sustainability of programme results. Further attention will be paid to the cross-cutting issues of gender, climate change and Environmental & Social Management. The methodological mix includes assessment of quantitative and qualitative data with a strong focus on key-stakeholder perspectives.

The document is based on the analysis of project documents and presentations and key-stakeholder meetings and beneficiary interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) as well as informal discussions with the project staff during two field missions and site visits, the first in May 2019 to Tbilisi (Monitoring and Evaluation Workshop) and the second in September 2019 to the project areas in all three countries. (see detailed agenda, photo-documentation and list of meetings in Annex.). The evaluation report is complemented by individual case studies for each country. The wealth of information contained in the interview summaries/minutes of meetings (MoMs) could only partly be covered by the report. It is highly recommended to read the success stories (Annex) and the selection of MoMs (Annex) for the specific insights and opinions shared by the stakeholders.

3 Evaluation Findings

3.1 Contribution to Overall Objective

The ECF programme has a main focus on contractual nature conservation through long-term community based Conservation Agreements complemented with a substantial share of land use planning, participatory approaches, rural development activities and capacity building. This integrated approach is assessed to be a strength of ECF.

The programme is one of the "four pillars"¹ of the long-term strategy of German Financial Cooperation for Nature Conservation in the South Caucasus. ECF focuses on the connections (Eco-corridors) of valuable ecological areas for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

In general, the programme can be summarized with a set of overall goals:

- 1.) Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity outside Protected Areas;
- 2.) Securing at least equal income to the local rural population;
- 3.) Supporting beneficiaries to manage the land in ecologically sound way and
- 4.) Setting up a funding facility (Eco-Regional Fund) as an instrument to promote sustainable land use practices and to fund the conservation agreements beyond the project duration.

The objectives are assessed to be coherently addressed through the selection of project areas and activities.

For the set-up phase (also called pilot phase) the programme has selected three priority corridors, two in the Lesser Caucasus (AM/GE) and one in the Greater Caucasus (AZ), which are all characterized as high biodiversity cultural landscapes. In the project areas, unsustainable resource use by the local communities (identified core problem in the ToR) has considerably impacted the mountain areas, with overgrazing, logging and poaching as important part of people's livelihood strategies in the soviet time and post-soviet transition period.

The programme has identified and selected areas through habitat analysis and land use planning, which are relevant for the conservation targets and concluded long term conservation agreements with the participating communities/CBOs. Initial community trust, motivation and awareness were created through Financial Participatory Approach (FPA) enabling competition winners to implement own priority small-scale projects. The approach has also prepared communities to commit themselves for the implementation of long-term conservation agreements (CA).

The CA contracts have fixed long-term management plans, developed in direct dialogue with the local community representatives, for the demarcated lands (different zones) including task descriptions for maintenance of habitats and high value elements of landscape, employment of care-takers and field-guards, measures to prevent poaching, and sustainable use of grasslands and forest. The conservation agreements also make provisions for community projects including small scale infrastructure, equipment and maintenance in order to ensure that community benefits outweigh use restrictions.

¹ Four pillars: 1. Support Project for Protected Areas (SPPA) - establishment of PAs; 2. Caucasus Nature Fund (CNF) - support for operation and management of PAs; 3. Transboundary Joint Secretariat (TJS) - for cross border cooperation and linkages

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

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Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

The commitment for the ECF-implementation period is ensured through yearly payments from the existing CBO/NGO savings accounts according to provisions and menu of measures fixed in the conservation contracts. Payment is based on performance and credible verification through monitoring and reporting of results. The approach contributes to the overall objective through engagement and delegation of responsibility to the communities and supports them through awareness creation and contractual commitment to keep up the engagement in the long-term. A monitoring system including camera traps, field monitoring, and use of a smart-phone monitoring app "Earth Beat", that was specifically designed in the framework of the programme and will be implemented by WWF during the ECF CA period.

In total, 19 Conservation Agreements (CA): 6 in Armenia, 3 in Azerbaijan, 10 in Georgia have been signed (1 of them still in process in AZ). In all three countries the programme has been successfully implemented with national adaptations, which enrich the scope for lessons learned from the different experiences. The outputs and the corresponding activities are coherent with the objectives and relevant to address the core problems.

This evaluation is made after almost completion of the 5 years programme 'set-up of ECF', while the ECF CA implementation continues for another 6-9² years. At the time of evaluation most conservation agreements have been in operation for around one year. The success and sustainability of the CA implementation can therefore not be assessed yet.

In difference to the initial assumption³, in many areas especially in Georgia and Armenia, the pressure on the land, especially through overgrazing and agricultural activities, had already reduced after the downfall of the Soviet Union. In consequence, the programme has not only been confronted with the need to restrict/manage use in certain areas, but also with the task of encouraging traditional uses (e.g. as haymaking) in order to maintain high biodiversity agro-ecological zones and developing alternative income opportunities. This situation has partly eased the involvement of local communities and their still existing traditional practices and has facilitated the focus on win-win situations. Also the recovery of key species had to some extent already started before the project, a decrease of hunting for subsistence purposes is reported, which now makes the task for care-takers easier to control the conservation areas.

In terms of target species selection, a number of strategic decisions were made in order to facilitate agreements with the local population. For example, Caucasian Red Deer (*Cervus elapses maral*), Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra*), Bezoar Goat (*Capra aegagrus aegagrus*), Armenian Mouflon (*Ovis orientalis gmelini*) Eastern Caucasian Tur (*Capra cylindricornis*) and Caucasian Leopard (*Panthera pardus saxicolor*) (and also Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*) to a lesser extent) are species which were/are certainly hunted, but also very much appreciated by the local population. A focus on the more controversial Wolf (*Canis Lupus*) would have created disagreement from the beginning, thus putting project success at risk, which was avoided by choice of target species. Also, "no-use zones" were identified (where possible) in remote, high altitude grasslands that were in most cases not very intensely used for livestock grazing. With this approach, a focus was put on achievable targets, with

of PAs; and 4 Eco Corridors Fund (ECF) - to improve linkages and connectivity of PAs in traditional use zones. (see also KfW, MoM GE 16; TJS MoM GE 13)

² Generally 10 years, in case of last 4 CAs in Armenia 7 years were agreed.

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

clearly defined indicators of increase in numbers for the target species. In some of the project areas, in all three countries, there are already signs of recovery of populations of target species.

3.2 Relevance

This chapter describes the relevance of the project from the perspective of different stakeholder groups. During the evaluation mission, stakeholders of different categories (government/ non-government/ beneficiaries) have described the relevance of the project as high, mainly for its innovative character, the successful involvement of communities and its combination of nature conservation and socio-economic development. Overall, according to stakeholders, a crucial point for the relevance of the programme is that the communities have been assigned a real protagonist role in ECF and the programme has created a base of practical experiences in this regard. Building upon its innovative character, the programme has the potential for further development based on lessons learned, extension to new communities/corridors, shaping national policies, as well as international replication/adaptation of community involvement approaches in Nature Conservation.

Stakeholder perspectives:

WWF: From WWF perspective the project is praised as one of the successful projects of WWF⁴ and also more emphatically as the "Future of Nature Conservation"⁵ by default of large scale, uninhabited, unused areas that can be strictly protected; but also as a response to the concern that nature conservation without people's support cannot be sustainable in the long run.⁶ From WWF-Germany perspective 1.) the integration of the ECF programme into the Ecoregional Conservation Plan (ECP) including the South Caucasus countries as well as Iran, Turkey and Russia and 2.) the strong linkages and synergies with the South Caucasus Leopard conservation programme were highlighted.

Ministries of Environment (MoE) / Focal points ECF and local government: The representative of the MoE of Armenia sees ECF as a good example in the general trend in post-revolution Armenia to give more rights to the people and make nature conservation more effective.⁷ Also from the perspective of the MoE of Azerbaijan (Head of PA department) the project is seen in a very positive way by turning land users into collaborators.⁸ The Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Environment

³ See also presentation by Jernej Stritih: ECF 'Scope and Methods' for a set of modified assumptions in ECF.

⁴ "Overall ECF is one of the successful projects for WWF. It is new, innovative and the involvement of local people in nature protection is a key factor." (MoM AM01)

⁵ "ECF is a model for the future of conservation projects not only in the Caucasus, but in the World. There is no other way to develop Nature Protection in large scale. Now there are also scientific statements that Nature needs 50% of terrestrial area to be managed sustainably. Before, in the CBD process it was 17%. This is a new vision for Nature Conservation and there is no other way to reach this percentage without close cooperation with the local population. The lands are limited. With ECF we are testing an approach, but the input is for the future. This is the global aspect of the programme." (MoM GE17)

⁶ The police type of protection (...) is not sustainable, there is no awareness and no ownership. People know that it is beautiful to have the leopards but beautiful is not enough, the motivation for conservation is needed." (MoE AZ 10).

⁷ "Without the involvement of people, the work cannot be done effectively. ECF is a good example for other projects in this regard. After revolution there is a tendency to give more rights to people and many are very active at present. If people are strong and united they can make the government take decisions pro or contra a specific development." (MoE AM04)

⁸ "Best achievement of the project is the involvement of the communities into the conservation measures, the land users and resource users have in many cases a negative impact and now this project is turning the communities into collaborators and sometimes friends. Of course the ECF project cannot cover all problems in our areas but it needs to focus on critical areas. It is a bit early to talk about success of the project, we will see that when we get feed-back from the sites later. The

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

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Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

Protection and Agriculture (MEPA/Georgia) emphasized the dual benefits for the habitats/migration of wildlife and the social conditions of the local people. The project is seen as an important link in the government efforts.⁹ The Head of the Biodiversity department (MEPA)/Georgia mentioned the importance of the programme to support people to get a feeling for nature protection and get benefits from awareness, capacity building, infrastructures, equipment at the same time.¹⁰ The local government administrations of all three countries unanimously praised the project for investments into socio-economic improvements including village infrastructure, machinery for agriculture etc. Additionally, there is evidence that the project has drawn the attention of governors and municipalities to some of the remote project communities, in several cases for the first time (e.g. Saribash/AZ, Gonaghkend/AZ).

UNDP (Co-Financing Partner): The coordinator of UNDP Armenia GEF-SGP (co-financing partner for ECF Armenia) sees the programme as a very important project for Armenia and emphasized the direct involvement of the communities.

SPPA, TJS, CNF: The focus on the connections of valuable ecological areas (Eco-corridors) for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity of is one of the "four pillars"¹¹ of the long-term strategy of German Financial Cooperation for Nature Conservation in the South Caucasus. From the side of the KfW-financed South Caucasus Nature Protection programmes/ organizations ("3 other pillars" SPPA, TJS, SPPA)) the feed-back on the relevance of ECF is generally positive. CNF representatives emphasized the importance of community integration and the potential of addressing the topic also in the buffer zone communities of the Protected Areas.¹² All CNF, TJS and SPPA acknowledge the good example and advocate for the continuation of ECF in a next phase, however all formulate the wish for more coordination between the "pillars"¹³, for example better exchange on the development of the monitoring software (CNF) and the further development and extension of successful community engagement approaches in buffer zones of PAs and in promotion of community representation in decision making in the PA administration at national as well as park level (SPPA/CNF). ECF is perceived as a highly innovative and relevant programme.

achievements require in-depth monitoring (scientific and community) but if successful it should be replicated to other areas." (MoM AZ04)

⁹ "First, the eco-corridors are important for migration of species and the connection of protected areas and a lot of effort was put into habitat protection with different agencies and on different levels including legal changes so the project constitutes an important link in the government efforts. Second, the social conditions of people are important. In the project it was very visible how it supports the environmental factors as well as the socio-economic situation. The local people are the main beneficiaries." (MoM GE04-MEPA)

¹⁰ "The conservation agreements are a very special and new tool, people need to get a feeling how to protect nature and get benefits from awareness, capacities, infrastructures, equipment etc at the same time. The local population is very interested." (MoM GE03-MEPA)

¹¹ Four pillars: 1. Support Project for Protected Areas (SPPA) - establishment of PAs; 2. Caucasus Nature Fund (CNF) - support for operation and management of PAs; 3. Transboundary Joint Secretariat (TJS) - for cross border cooperation and linkages of PAs; and 4 Eco Corridors Fund (ECF) - to improve linkages and connectivity of PAs in traditional use zones. (see also KfW, MoM GE 16-KfW; TJS MoM GE 13 - TJS)

¹² "I am very happy with the ECF project, CNF is working in PAs covering operation, the question of community representation in protection was not addressed for a long time and this is where ECF has created a good example how to achieve this. It is necessary, because you could have a golden fence around the PA, it is not going to work, if you do not integrate the communities." (MoM AM 05 -CNF)

¹³ "Actually more coordination between the projects would be necessary and also continuation, now we are all somewhere in the middle of the process. The processes are very long-term processes." (MoM GE13-TJS)

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

KfW: From KfW perspective the ECF covers several aspects that match with future thematic orientations for German development cooperation as agro-ecological approach and landscape approach as well as climate change adaptation and ecosystem services. A strength of ECF is seen in the protagonist role of local communities in locally accepted land-use planning for effective biodiversity conservation and natural resource management¹⁴ as well as in the facilitation and capacity building approach.¹⁵

3.3 Effectiveness

This chapter assesses the effectiveness of the different steps of the planning and implementation, with a special focus on the community involvement processes.

According to interviewed stakeholders at implementation level one of the biggest strengths of the project was the effective process to engage local communities for long-term conservation and for their own socio-economic benefits ("win-win situations") not via classic grants but through a participatory approach that led to a performance based system and payments for eco-system services.

The first step of the facilitators was to establish village committees and the Regional Working Groups in each region. The RWGs were formed and members were selected by facilitators of the NGOs on the criteria of willingness to cooperate and activism: mix of teachers, leaders, respected persons, governmental representatives (executive authority), municipality members, NGOs and young activists of the target communities.

The Financial Participatory Approach (FPA) was adapted to the project context with the objective to draw attention to environmental topics and reveal local knowledge and positive attitudes as well as to build trust with small but immediate cash benefits, create ownership through implementation of self-determined projects and to gain experience with community decision making.¹⁶ For the community facilitation, local NGOs¹⁷ and individual facilitators were contracted and trained. The results of the FPA approach were then used to determine which communities would be able and willing to commit themselves for a subsequent conservation agreement. (see FPA assessment case-study in Annex)

¹⁴ "ECF covers certain aspects that match with an agro-ecological approach as well as a landscape approach. The combination of biodiversity and land-use, the sustainable agriculture and the management of protected areas and a locally accepted land-use planning as precondition for effective biodiversity conservation and natural resource management are further future themes where ECF has experiences to share. Also Climate change adaptation, ecosystem services etc. Another crucial point is that the communities are assigned a protagonist role in ECF. This is the innovation which should be further developed. In this aspect ECF has some advance compared to other projects and approaches in other countries, as there is a base of practical experiences." (MoM D01-KfW)

¹⁵ "In ECF the most successful aspect from my perspective was the good example how to explain things to people: we do not want to impose restrictions, we want to show you how to manage your assets better and live better!" (MoM GE16-KfW)

¹⁶ "For FPA we had to adapt the rules to the process in order to increase transparency. It was very important to communicate that there is no hidden agenda. It is crucial to have correct facilitators at community level. In the beginning we had to be involved very much and we had to train facilitators. Criteria for the selection of facilitators were that they should have a good background, be appreciated in the community and are "pure" (in the sense of "not intriguing"/ "not involved in possible village intrigues)". (MoM GE01 - ECF)

¹⁷ Khustup NGO, FBDAH-Ararat, RDC Vayots Dzor, Work and Motherland, Martiros Charitable Fund and Bezoar NGO in Armenia, Oikos Consulting for Shaki / Zagatala and REC AZ for Guba in Azerbaijan; NGO Toleranti in Georgia.

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

Management of Natural Resources / Land use: Wildlife protection and regeneration, through control of hunting/poaching in the selected migration corridors and through pasture management incl. haymaking are the main focus of the land- and resource management plans fixed in the conservation agreements. These management plans were developed in direct dialogue with the local community representatives during the process of negotiating the CAs, with limited targeted input of technical experts where required. Lands are either municipal or state lands and land tenure arrangements are made within the conservation agreements. In Armenia community land ownership is under administration of Municipalities (Consolidated Communities) and agreements are concluded in form of tri-partite agreements between municipalities, Community Based NGOs, WWF and specifically include land lease and compensation provisions. In Azerbaijan, pasture land belongs to the state managed by the district. High mountain summer pastures are leased to commercial farmers, owning significant herds of sheep managed in a form of transhumance. Conservation agreements include buyout and transfer of these leases to the CBO and/or partial compensation of leaseholders to allow for implementation of conservation measures and management by the CBOs. In Georgia where community lands belong to the state, a pilot for a long-term lease for a symbolic fee to the community is in process of government approval. In all three countries forest land is owned by the national forest agencies and was included in the conservation agreements only in terms of general anti-poaching measures and establishing cooperation between CBOs and forest agencies. The land ownership issue is assessed to be a central aspect in the set-up of ECF, enabling a transition from 'tragedy of the commons'-situation towards clarified use-rights and a 'responsible management situation'.

Additionally to the community control over the land resources, the development of trust, motivation and facilitation of community cooperation opportunities for sustainable land use are central aspects of the ECF programme.

Habitat and Conservation Approach: In terms of habitat and conservation measures the main focus was placed on ensuring the control of hunting/poaching and management of grazing and haymaking as well as sustainable wood and NTFP use. This is achieved through employing local care-takers, which is another main success factor of the programme. The care-takers have a big role despite their lack of enforcement capacities. The fact that somebody is controlling the land is already deterring hunters from going there, especially in their own community, the communicative approach also reaches those people who can be convinced¹⁸ and the others can still be threatened with photos that can be sent to the environmental inspectorate.¹⁹ Care-takers who are chosen for their interest and motivation for Nature Conservation and their readiness to spend a lot of time in the conservation areas, know what happens in the areas and are ready to promote awareness in their communities. They are proud of their achievements, e.g. being the local conservation experts with the capacity to show visitors the areas as well as display the videos of camera traps or own videos and photos of wild animals - a strong self-confidence and empowerment factor.

¹⁸ "Yes we have some encounters with hunters, we saw them and went to them and we informed them that they are not allowed to hunt in the area and they went away and we have not seen them in this area again. There is still some lack of knowledge and people accept the information and also they do not want to be caught on photo. The hunters were from the area, neighboring village." (MoM GE08 - Zanavi)

¹⁹ "When we sit with shepherds, farmers, hunters and we are talking with them, this also has a very good impact. We explain to them, but with some we also scare them, we don't have the guns but we scare them with talk. Before we started the work, conservation was very ineffective, there were only a few people in the inspectorate." (MoM 11 - Gnishik ICEF)

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

Their position - being supported by the community- strengthens their motivation and responsibility. The fact that there are cases in the project areas, where hunters from the community call the care-takers to inform them about outside hunters coming into the area is an indicator for a community support of their position. This is reinforced through their tasks for awareness raising in the communities, especially if they give awareness trainings and biodiversity classes in schools. The approach of low-level law enforcement but intensive communication seems to work, at least in areas that are not immediately needed for the economic survival of local communities and thus require only a low level of restrictions and in return give a high level of ownership and benefits from sustainable traditional uses as hay-making.

The additional field-guards (in some of the CAs / Georgia) prove to be effective to prevent livestock movement into core zones and not-allowed forest areas in areas with a high stocking of livestock and considerable grazing pressure. However, the learning process of grazing management / implementation of grazing management plans needs yet to be continued. Biggest difficulty are reportedly situations when outsiders and shepherds, who frequently change, are not aware of current conservation agreements. So far the communication approach of care-takers is assessed to work quite well, but in future there may be incidents where they will need to be back-stopped and supported in case of conflicts within the communities or with high level hunters or sheep owners.

Socio-economic-measures: Measures for socio-economic benefits were implemented following FPA contests and through the budget allocated in the CAs. According to the menu eligible activities are related to small scale community infrastructure (rehabilitation of roads, water supply, electricity and internet connections, street lighting, development of value chains as tourism, milk processing, wool, meat, forest products, handicraft and activities supporting the community as schools, kindergartens and community centres. (see Annex of country case study reports).

Activities were selected by the communities according to community priorities. It was however important that the activities should not be in conflict with project activities and not cause environmental damage. The communities were free to decide, but in some cases the NGOs or ECF facilitators set the themes a bit stricter than others²⁰, suggesting that the projects should have a community benefit and an environmental benefit (e.g. case of AZ). In order to categorize the projects, a ranking could be done according to the 'income generation potential' as well as the 'environmental benefit'. In this case environmentally beneficial projects with a good income generation potential would rank highest (e.g. walnut plantation to stabilize an erosion slope, Bash Keldek) and projects with no economic and no environmental benefit would rank lowest (e.g. monument reconstruction at the village entrance, Areni). Unfortunately, during this evaluation, not all projects could be assessed including an analysis of the underlying rationales, but in general it can be stated that projects made a lot of sense to the people. They definitely put a lot of their energy into the implementation, which created motivation and ownership. This had been the main objective at this stage and was effectively achieved. Community demands for future projects are high and readiness to make own contributions is big.

²⁰ see field notes / case study on FPA approach in the Annex.

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

3.4 Efficiency

This chapter looks at the inputs and outputs of the programme. Aspects of the programme efficiency are described at the level of implemented activities for the outcomes 1-4 qualitatively and quantitatively on the basis of ToR Indicators. This evaluation is not an audit of the programme and the focus was not placed on control of costs and expenditures, but rather analyses if the outcomes were achieved and which amount of inputs was necessary for it.

The overall expenditure of the Disposition Fund according to the 4 outputs in comparison with the initial budget is presented in the following table and input output relation is subsequently assessed for each output in the sub-chapters.

	Budget 2015	Expected 2020	total
Total	5'171'920	5'171'920	
<u>Output 1: Establishment of ECF</u>	210'000	337'317	
<u>Output 2: Preparation of Land Use Plans</u>	1'650'000	335'316	
<u>Output 3: Negotiation & implementation of ecological measures</u>	2'835'420	4'233'189	
<u>Output 4: Fundraising for ECF</u>	326'500	116'099	
<u>Capacity building of the WWF</u>	150.000	150'000	

Figure 2: Overall budget of the disposition fund

The higher than planned expenditures for Output 1 are mainly related to the costs for additional capacity building for partner institutions. For Output 2 expenditures were lower than planned, due to less need for technical expertise. Also in Output 4 less money was spent than initially planned. The un-spent budget of Outputs 1 and 4 was allocated to Outputs 1 and 3 including more extensive FPA and more conservation agreements (CAs) than initially planned.

3.4.1 Output Area 1

Output Area 1: The ECF has been established as an instrument for promoting sustainable land use practices in ecological corridors.

ToR Indicator: Established ECF. Cost planned, Actual Cost. Functionality.

The budget for establishment of ECF (210'000 EUR) was exceeded (337'000 EUR) due to the implementation of partner organisation capacity building programmes for operation of the ECF in 2018 and 2019, which were allocated under this budget heading. The surplus budget was shifted from unspent amount of Output 2.

Activities implemented were:

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

- Opening of a separate bank account by WWF CauPO in Georgia and Armenia and CBO/NGO bank accounts in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan;
- Establishing for the governance of the ECF, including meetings of the national consultative groups and the regional forum, the regional management board;
- Concluding framework agreements with the relevant sector ministries in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia;
- Developing administrative implementation procedures including the ECF Manual and the Menu of Conservation Measures;
- The establishment of ECF communication strategy and plan (international STE), production of communication materials;
- Capacity building for the ECF Team, for local communities and for important government partners.

The Eco Corridor Fund has been established as a programme activity of the WWF Caucasus with set of bank savings accounts under WWF (as per separate agreement). The ECF is governed by a Management Board consisting of the three WWF country directors with KfW participating as observer. The decision making procedures are set in the Operations Manual adopted on June 1. 2016. The involvement of other stakeholders has been secured through the Regional Consultative Forum (Steering Committee according to the ToR) convened once a year and National Consultative Groups.

At the end of the set-up phase, the option of establishing ECF as its own legal entity is being considered by the WWF along with the establishment of WWF offices in the Caucasus as national organisations.

Before setting-up the ECF saving accounts for each Conservation Agreement, a study was made by Sparkassen Stiftung to assess the banking system, propose cooperation partners and make recommendations. In Armenia, the ECF savings accounts owned by the CBOs with disbursement control of WWF were setup with ABB bank²¹. In Georgia and for Azerbaijan, Procredit Bank was selected for Conservation Agreement savings accounts owned by WWF. The CBOs opened own operational accounts in the following banks: Zanavi, Bolajuri - Bank of Georgia, Khevasheni, Chorchani, Pkhero - Liberty Bank; and for Dertseli, Mokhe, Tsikhisubani, Naminauri - TBC Bank. In Azerbaijan the CBO operational bank accounts are with Capital Bank.²² There is some difference in the arrangement for the three countries as a consequence of different circumstances in the banking sector. In Armenia, it was possible to set up initially envisaged CBO savings accounts with the right of WWF to freeze and recover the funds in case of non-performance. This was not possible with a

²¹ "This was recommended by Sparkassen Stiftung, there was also ACBA Agricol Bank which would have been a more green bank, but we followed the recommendation of Sparkassen Stiftung in this regard". (MoM AM 01).

²² "For the selection of the bank we also followed the recommendation of Sparkassen Stiftung. In order to be on the safe side legally, we hired two legal experts for studies to clarify all possibilities related to flow of funds. Also the VAT issues were analysed deeply under <2000 AZN - no VAT. For business contracts in FPA transfer to the CBO bank account was used. For purchase of tractor etc. the RWG allowed to make a tender and transaction to bank account. During FPA, grants for creativeness (max 200-500 AZN) were used to disburse cash. For ECF Instead of a grant agreement a service agreement between WWF and the CBOs was concluded, the disposition fund is directly transferred to the CBO bank accounts. (MoM AZ 09 -ECF)

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

reputable bank in Georgia, so savings accounts owned by WWF were set up. In Azerbaijan, the banking sector was not deemed reliable enough to set up savings account for ten years, so the accounts for Azeri CAs were set up in Tbilisi and are operated by WWF. The CBOs then have operational accounts in AZ with Capital Bank. The grant is deposited to the savings account in Tbilisi and the annual tranches are transferred to the AZ accounts according to the schedule. The budget for the concluded conservation agreements has been disbursed to the saving accounts with the exception of the pending agreement (to be signed end 2019).

The ECF fund set-up as an disposition fund account under WWF and separate saving accounts for each Conservation Agreement CBO is assessed to be easy to handle and transparent. The budget for the CAs is transferred to the CBO account with WWF having a possibility to block the yearly instalments in case of non-compliance with a monitoring function in the municipalities²³ where they are party to the Conservation Agreement. In general the ECF set-up is assessed to be efficient, the conservation contracts fix all necessary provisions and give the implementing partners clear guidelines, transparency and long-term investment security, which is a trust-building and motivating factor for the communities.

Capacity building for local communities initially focused on the needs associated with the FPA process, such as project design and implementation and technical trainings for activities emerging from the FPA. The next stage were study tours to other regions in the country (Georgia) or in the neighboring country (from Azerbaijan to Georgia) or exchanges between communities (Armenia).

Once the Conservation Agreements were negotiated and entered implementation, the focus shifted on the financial literacy and business planning and management. The financial literacy trainings were organised with an in-kind contribution from the Sparkassen Stiftung and implemented in 2018 and 2019.

An important part of the institutional setup has been capacity building for the ECF team, WWF and the partner institutions including ministries, forest agencies, agencies for protected areas and others. In the first two years of the set-up phase two exposure visits were organised to Germany with participants from the ECF team, WWF and Ministries, focusing on sustainable land use, payments for conservation and landscape conservation practices. As the project progressed, focus of capacity building shifted to the national institutions managing the ecosystems in the corridor landscapes or having administrative responsibilities related to community conservation. In all three countries these included the forest agency, in Armenia it also included the environmental inspectorate and in Azerbaijan the Protected Areas (National Park and State Reserves) and the regional environmental inspectorates.

In Georgia the capacity building of forest agencies started with the capacity building needs assessment of the Adjara Forest Agency.²⁴ In 2019, additional support was provided for the

²³ "The community of Areni provides the land for free and the saving account is based in the Gnishik ICEF, who implements the projects. The municipality has to clear the utilisation of the funds. I am responsible for approving all transfers in the municipality and it is a good arrangement to be continued. The approval of the transactions is speedy and the NGO cannot spend without approval which improves the control and accountability."(MoM AM 10 -Areni Municipality)

²⁴ This was completed with the development of the new business model for the Agency and a training on communication, silviculture and forest roads for the staff of the Adjara Forest Agency in October 2017. This activity was done in coordination with the UNDP project "Enhancing Management of the Protected Areas in

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

adaptation of the forestry legislation of the Adjara Autonomous Republic to the new national forest code. The value of the programme was 33.000 EUR.

In Armenia, cooperation was agreed with Hayantar SNCO (now transformed to Forest Committee) in 2017 to implement the forest related conservation measures in the Conservation Agreements in Khachik, Sisian and Zarithap. Hayantar agreed to provide the necessary support for the implementation of these measures, including participation in the development of the multifunctional forest management plans, and cooperation with the local community in their implementation.²⁵ The value of the programme was 26.000 EUR. A memorandum of understanding was signed between WWF-Armenia and the State Environmental Inspectorate on collaboration in the field of protection of biodiversity. One of the key paragraph of the MoU was connected with close cooperation of the inspectors with caretakers of the CAs.

In Azerbaijan a capacity needs assessment was conducted in cooperation with the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources looking at the needs of the regional units of the Forest Department, protected areas (Shahdag National Park, Zakatala, Illisu and Gakh State Reserves, regional inspectorates).²⁶ The programme was implemented in 2019 and its value was 105.000 EUR.

The objective of output 1 is assessed to be fully achieved.

Extensive activities for capacity building for ECF set-up (FPA, exposure visits) operation and for partner stakeholders e.g. inspectorate, forest agencies etc) were implemented and budget was allocated under the Output 1 "Set-up" of the ECF.

Fully Achieved ✓	Almost Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved
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3.4.2 Output Area 2

Output Area 2: Using the ECF funds, long-dated land use plans have been developed with participation of the beneficiaries; the plans are aiming to support the ecologically sound use of natural resources.

ToR Indicator: All measures agreed upon are based on land use plans.

Out of 1'650'000 Euro available budget for Output 2, 335.000 Euro (approx. 20%) were spent. The explanation is that due to the success of FPA and ability to draw on local knowledge related to land use, less money than budgeted was spent for experts, many activities could be covered by WWF in-house and ECF programme staff, the remaining amount was allocated to Output 3 "Conservation agreements / implementation". The allocation of FPA to Output 1 "Capacity building activities" and Output 3 "Conservation Agreements".

Ajara" and the BMZ BENG0 project "Improving the resilience of forest ecosystem through Adaptive Forest Management in Georgia".

²⁵ Forest management plans were prepared between 2018 and 2019, including a forest restoration plan for the Zarithap forest area destroyed by fire in the summer of 2017. As capacity building measure a vehicle for rapid response and fire fighting equipment were provided to the Forest Agency.

²⁶ The capacity building programme included the provision of several rapid response vehicles, fire fighting and other equipment, as well as joint trainings for the state agencies and CBO caretakers. The purpose of these

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

Activities implemented were:

- Selection of 3 priority ecological corridors and the specific target areas based on transparent criteria as laid down in the Ecoregional Conservation Plan (WWF). Armenia: Khosrov and Nakhichevan Mountain Range; Azerbaijan: Shaghdagh and Greater Caucasus Range; Georgia: Borjomi NP-Adigeni-Adjara PAs
- Production of multi-layer GIS mapping/remote sensing including land cover, existing Protected Areas, migration corridors, population density and human pressure through land use as well as habitat suitability for target species: Red Deer, Chamois, Caucasian Tur, Mouflon, Brown Bear and Leopard (strategic reduction on 3-4 indicator species per corridor depending on area). The analysis of environmental variables and human variables was done using traditional knowledge and modern technologies;
- Support to the development of local land use plans (habitat management & conservation plans) using highly participatory approaches (RRA / FPA);

Selected target areas are analysed as high biodiversity cultural landscapes, with some undisturbed areas but mainly human impacted areas with highest biodiversity in temperate zones (biodiversity hotspots). The areas are highly diverse and rich in resources with original traditional agriculture products, a mosaic of ethnic and culturally distinct populations and a lot of cultural heritage - resources which are often not sufficiently valued. This analysis has substantially extended the focus from "eco-corridors" as migration connections between Protected Areas towards the focus on a landscape approach as a synthesis of people and place. Additionally to Nature Conservation the Cultural Landscape Approach preserves biodiversity above the habitat level (e.g. higher biodiversity on sustainably used zones than with forest succession - see example of European Alps).

The development of land use plans (=>habitat and conservation management plans) was guided by the principle to look for win-win situations for people and biodiversity, instead of focusing on trade-offs. The focus on target species was made on species that most people know and have a positive attitude to, which made it easy for people to understand the issues and be motivated. The habitat suitability analysis followed the guiding question of "where is it possible to make a difference?" e.g. to reduce pressures and enhance protection. A further important approach was to involve the institutional partners, local government authorities, forest agencies and Nature Protection agencies who are in control of the land (in Georgia also the National State Property Agency NSPA), and bring them to the table and to some extent invest into their capacity building through the project. At the stage of developing habitat management and conservation plans and develop socio-economic community compensation measures the project was guided by looking at the best opportunities not at the most difficult ones. These opportunities were translated into a "menu" of eligible measures, from which the applicable measures to each corridor context were selected and on which the conservation agreements (CA) are based.

The analysis of community land use and community development priorities was made with participatory methodologies. Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Financial Participatory Approach (FPA),

trainings was to establish contact, coordination and cooperation between the CBOs and the state agencies

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

combining a collective learning on conservation objectives and ownership of self-determined socio-economic development. In this context, the programme explicitly focused on supporting people to express their interests and to understand long-term interests as well as to develop common ground and context based solutions, instead of coming with readymade solutions and train communities to propose/demand what donors are looking for. Communities are further encouraged and capacitated to use the programme as a springboard to mobilize other resources. The participatory approach FPA enabled the programme to select communities based on their willingness to cooperate. Initially, larger number of communities was included in FPA than finally contracted in long-term conservation agreements (see output 3).

Despite the reduced budget expenditure for this output area, the objective of output 2 is assessed to be fully achieved.

Fully Achieved ✓	Almost Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved
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3.4.3 Output Area 3

Output Area 3: Based on the land use plans concrete measures have been agreed upon (Conservation Agreements) and are implemented.

ToR Indicator: Long-term commitments to the target group are made for at least 40% of the available financial means for the promotion of the sustainable use of natural resources;

Activities implemented were:

- Negotiating long-term nature conservation measures and concluding contracts with local user groups
- Providing short-term financial support for the measures agreed upon
- Providing technical support to the measures which are implemented by the target group in a self-dependent way
- Strengthening of local stakeholders who function as mediator to the local user group (e.g. forest and agricultural authorities, NGOs)
- Monitoring of the ecological and socio- economic impact of the conservation measures and provision of payments to the local user groups in regular (e.g. annual) intervals.
- An impressive number of trainings for community representatives and facilitators as well as for project staff were conducted in all three countries (for a list of trainings see Annex).
- The implementation of FPA activities is considered under output 3: In total FPA was carried out in 100 communities and 406'000 EUR were spent in the communities, not including capacity building and facilitation. Costs of facilitation, capacity building and on demand technical support were 456'000 EUR.
- In Armenia, 26 communities with 24'229 inhabitants have participated in FPA, 26 awards were distributed and a total of 150'498 EUR was spent on awards and supported projects. Total cost of the FPA activities is 322.695 EUR (150,498 Euro FPA activities + 172,197 EUR costs for facilitating NGOs, capacity building and on demand support). (see Annex)

operating in the same territory or in the vicinity.

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

- In Azerbaijan 40 communities with 28.850 inhabitants have participated in FPA, 92 awards were distributed and a total of 183,222 EUR was spent on FPA awards plus 123.686 EUR costs for facilitating NGOs, capacity building and on demand support. (see Annex)
- In Georgia FPA was carried out in 34 villages with a total number of 23'509 people and a total of 72'000 EUR was spent on FPA awards plus 160.322 EUR of facilitation and capacity building cost. (see Annex)
- In total, 19 Conservation Agreements (CA) were signed and are in process of implementation: 6 in Armenia, 3 in Azerbaijan, 10 in Georgia (1 of them still in process in AZ).

The ToR included a provision for possible short-term measures, expecting that some immediate conservation interventions and/or investments could or should be implemented directly by the WWF. During the project implementation it turned out that no such opportunities or needs arose, so all the available funds were budgeted for the long-term conservation agreements. These do include initial investments needed for their implementation (vehicles, equipment, pasture infrastructure, road improvement etc.).

An overview of the CAs is given in the following table:

Conservation Agreement	Beneficiary villages in Community	Total Area (ha)	Core Zone Area (ha)	Budget (EUR) (incl. initial)	Initial Investment (EUR)	Annual Instalment (EUR)	No. of years
ARMENIA							
Khachik ²⁷	1 of 8 villages in Areni community	5'193	794.1	250'000.00	75'600	16'306.00	11
Areni ²⁸	1 of 8 villages in Areni community	3'082.4	1029.3	125'000.00	37'500	8187.5	11
Zangakatun ²⁹	1 of 1 village	7'170	1'897	166'495.00	26'300	19'840.00	7
Arevis, Brnakot, Salvard and Tasik villages ³⁰	4 of 32 villages in Sisian community	7'021	2'276	254'611.00	39'000	30'523.00	7
Artavan and Saravan villages ³¹	2 of 8 villages in Zaritap community	7'531	1'524	162'972.00	26'000	19'196.00	7
Hors village ³²	1 of 12 villages in	1'798	621	105'270.00	16'061	12'400.00	7

²⁷ Wildlife habitat conservation plan of Khachik community - "GNISHIK" Intercommunity Environmental Foundation and Khachik community (Currently Khachik village of Areni community)

²⁸ Implementation of the Wildlife habitat conservation plan of Areni village of Areni Community - Areni community and "GNISHIK" Intercommunity Environmental Foundation

²⁹ Wildlife habitat conservation plan of "Gndasar-West" Conservation Area of Zangakatun Community - Fund for Biodiversity Conservation of Armenian Highland and Zangakatun community

³⁰ Wildlife habitat conservation plan for Shahaponq Conservation Area of Sisian community - Civil Voice NGO and Sisan community.

³¹ Wildlife habitat conservation plan within the administrative territories of Artavan and Saravan villages of Zaritap Community - «Martiros» Charitable Foundation and Zaritap community

³² Wildlife habitat conservation plan within the administrative territory of Hors Village of Eghegis Community - «Bezoar» NGO and Eghegis community

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

	Eghegis community						
Total Armenia		31'795.4	8'141.4	1'064'348.00	220'461	106'452.5	
Conservation Agreement	Beneficiary villages in Community	Total Area (ha)	Core Zone Area (ha)	Budget (EUR) (incl. initial)	Initial Investment (EUR)	Annual Instalment (EUR)	No. of years
AZERBAIJAN							
Gonaghkend (GTD-CBO)	Gonaghkend, Jimi, Garavulustu and Utukh (4 of 4)	16'000.00 ha (poaching prohibited)	5'000.00 ha (no go zone)	440'630.00	December 2018 - 25'000.00 January 2019 - 24'000.00	March 2019: 90'263.00 March 2020: 60'263.00 March 2021: 80'263.00 March 2022-27 20'263.00 March 2028: 39'263.00	10
Gakh/Parsidan (ATD-CBO)	Lakit Kotuklu, Saribash, Gashqachay (3 of 3)	5'215.5 ha (poaching prohibited)	775.9 ha (no go zone)	342'510.00	May 2019 - 21'000.00 June 2019 - 24'276.00 March 2020 - 15'750	June 2019: 63'000.00 March 2020-28 24'276.00	10
Khinaliq (KTD-CBO) signature due end 2019)	Communities: Khinaliq, Hapit, Alik, Cek, Galaykhudat, Gryz	2'862 ha (expected)	tbd	248'679 (expected)	tbd	tbd	10
Total Azerbaijan		24'077.5	5'775.9	1'031'819.00	110'026	n.a.	
Conservation Agreement	Number of villages in Community	Total Area (ha)	Core Zone Area (ha)	Budget (EUR) (incl. initial)	Initial Investment (EUR)	Annual Instalment (EUR)	No. of years
GEORGIA							
Dertseli	1	2'997	1053	211'546.90	45'400	16'614.69	10
Mokhe	1	2'740	786	204'771.20	44'600	16'017.12	10
Naminauri	1	1'862	229	171'464.20	41'100	13'036.42	10
Tsikhisubani	1	1'110	223	163'298.05	41'100	12'219.80	10
Khevasheni	1	1'762	1'165	61'690.00	13'660	4'803	10
Zanavi	1	2945	970	67'050.00	8'940	5'811	10
Pkhero	1	1'511	1'281	69'050.00	14'300	5'475	10
Chorchani	1	977	837	59'079.00	11'329	4'775	10
Bolajuri	1	1311	702	59'370.00	5'100	5'427	10
Kikibo (end 2019)	1	3'080	1'918	83'580.00	23'180	6'040	10

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

Total Georgia		20'295	9'164	1'150'899.35	248'709	n.a.	
Total ECF		76'167	23'080	3'247'066	579'196		

Table 1: Overview of ECF Conservation Agreements

Long-term conservation agreements (CA) were signed with communities covering more than 75'000 ha of land, including more than 23'000 ha of 'core zone' with stricter protection regime (no hunting, no grazing). For all areas, specific habitat management, conservation and socio-economic development measures were defined in the menu of measures as eligible activities and included in the CA. The budget for the initial investments and future yearly instalments was placed in the savings accounts of the CBOs, giving people the trust that the money 'is really there every year', if they comply with the contractual obligations.

In total 3.25 Mio EUR were deposited in the accounts for the long term agreements. This corresponds to roughly 40% of the entire project budget and more than 60% of the disposition fund e.g. available means. Additionally, approximately 860'000 EUR were spent for the participatory approach including capacity building and facilitation. Due to the big own contributions of communities in terms of labour and in many cases additional own financial resources, the efficiency of the relatively small project funding per individual activity is very high. The range of averaged payments under the CAs per hectare and per year range between 1,5 and 15 EUR. The level depends on the density of settlements in the landscape (defining the size of community lands of a village), the set of measures agreed and the general level of prices in a country. This is way less than agri-environmental payments in the EU.

Output 3 is assessed to be fully achieved.

Fully Achieved	✓	Almost Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved
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3.4.4 Output Area 4

Output Area 4: Acquisition of additional financial resources for the ECF.

ToR Indicator: At least 10% of the financial resources available to the ECF in 2017 are from sources beyond BMZ.

Activities implemented and financial input:

- A fundraising strategy for the acquisition of funds from public and private donors was developed in 2016 and 2017 for a total budget of 30'000 EUR.
- To implement the strategy, WWF employed one new staff in each office and 25.000 EUR was invested in their training and coaching by the experts who prepared the strategy.
- Participation in and organisation of workshops, congresses and other events on financing sustainable land use) for which some 10.000 EUR were spent in 2016-2018.
- Attract new donors to participate in ECF Steering Committee. The activity did not succeed in bringing concrete new donors to the table of the steering committee. Project experience has shown that donors were reluctant to contribute directly into the fund but prefer to implement concrete activities in a co-funding modality. In Armenia, UNDP has provided

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

matching funds to several conservation agreement to extend its scope. Slovenian Development cooperation approved just in late 2019 a project to develop sustainable forestry matching the conservation agreements in Adigeni Georgia. A concept note for co-funding by Swiss Development Cooperation has been submitted by WWF Armenia in September 2019.

- Cooperation was established with the WWF International Landscape Conservation Lab, an initiative to raise major funding for landscape level conservation projects with budget of 50.000 EUR. Based on the experience of the ECF, the concept for Western Georgia Forest Landscape Partnership was developed that is being actively pursued. Part of this initiative (Adjara Forestry) is being considered for future project funding by KfW.
- The indicator of 10% co-financing is reached with the approval of Slovenian Centre for International Development and Cooperation (CMSR) in late 2019 and includes initial co-funding by WWF Germany and co-financing of projects in Armenia through UNDP-GEF SGP and SDA / SDC-Programme.

Overall, the budget foreseen for the output (326'500 EUR) has been quite high with almost 50% of the expected acquisition (approx 800'000 EUR) to reach the indicator. However, significantly less funds have been used and more than 60% of the initial budget for the output has been re-allocated to Output 3.

With the initial co-funding of WWF Germany of 230'000 EUR, activities in Turkey and Russia were implemented in 2016 independently from the ECF programme in the South Caucasus. A further co-financing arrangement was made with the BMZ BENGGO project "Improving the resilience of forest ecosystem through Adaptive Forest Management in Georgia" that provided support for the development of forest management plans in Adjara. A new co-funding agreement of the Slovenian Centre for International Development and Cooperation (SMSR) for 563'000 EUR has been approved for sustainable forest management in Adigeni / Georgia to be implemented from 2020-2021. With these co-financing arrangements and the UNDP co-funding in Armenia (see below) the indicator is successfully attained.

However, the long-term strategy of re-filling the ECF Fund (and thus creating a sustainable fund structure) with support of other donors has not been successful yet. This has various reasons. One may be that the success of the ECF model has not yet been demonstrated and communicated fully. But most important may be the preference of funding agencies for direct programme funding within their strategic portfolio and own project proposals. Also the linkages of the Adjara Forestry Programme, as well as the initial funding for WWF Germany activities in Turkey and Russia to the ECF are not immediately increasing the sustainability of the ECF Fund. Now, at the end of the start-up phase the fundraising for the ECF-Fund with the purpose to extend the project areas to new corridors within the same programme would probably be more attractive, as it could now be based on successful experiences and positive results created. However, the clearly determined approach as well as the institutional linkage of the fund to WWF leave only limited flexibility for different donors to pool resources.

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

From KfW perspective the indicator of objective 4 (additional funding approx 800'000 EUR) has been assessed as too optimistic in the conception of the programme.³³ Nevertheless, several ideas of a multi-donor fund or a sinking fund remain alive if a solution for the sustainability and appropriateness of the institutional structure can be found and the risks of excessive coordination and administrative requirements can be mitigated without distortion of the participatory approach.

It is clear that the direct acquisition of additional funds to ECF is not the only issue of financial sustainability. Another relevant question is how other funds have been leveraged by the communities, e.g. if the communities have been enabled to submit proposals for other government programmes or if they could mobilize other counterpart funding and develop community projects.

Direct co-funding in the project areas was especially successful in Armenia, where co-funding arrangements were made with UNDP (GEF SGP) and the NGO Strategic Development Agency (SDA) (supported by SDC). The total value of 2 times 50'000 USD (total 91'000 EUR) was spent for street lighting in the village of Artavan and Zangakatun. (The arrangement is quite advantageous as it takes into account all ECF costs in the specific conservation agreements incl. salaries, car etc.). Currently, 3 other co-funding contracts with UNDP (GEF-SGP) of 50'000 USD each are in process of negotiation for solar-equipment, HWC prevention measures and an irrigation scheme for an apricot plantation. A SDA (SDC) co-financing has been leveraged for the village of Hors to construct cattle and shepherd shelters. In Georgia and Azerbaijan ECF projects have not as actively focused on tapping co-funding sources to increase project volumes in the target areas.

Indirect financial contributions were leveraged by the programme in all three countries. According to interviewed stakeholders³⁴, the re-construction and asphaltting of the road and the new construction of two major road bridges to Gonaghkend village by the Guba region in Azerbaijan was motivated at the signing ceremony of the ECF-CA and independently implemented by the governor. Similarly, the restoration of the village mosque and a memorial in Saribash village (Gakh region) by an unknown person is believed to be linked to the positive development spirit induced by the ECF programme, which however could not be verified³⁵. Also in Armenia and Georgia, ECF communities have experienced increased public/municipal activities in several project villages due to the social dynamics and ideas generated by the CBOs/ village groups. The amount of financial contributions could not be verified in the specific cases.

Output 4 is assessed to be achieved in terms of co-financing amount, but not as a sustainable fund structure. The achievements in directly and indirectly leveraging additional co-funding or government support were more than expected.

Fully Achieved	Almost Achieved	Partially Achieved ✓	Not Achieved
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³³ Regarding objective 4, the fundraising for ECF from other development partners (indicator 600.000 Euro) may or may not be covered. From KfW there would be no pressure to establish cooperation at any cost. It may be considered a misjudgement during the project conception to think that establishing a structure is sufficient for other donors to carry on. (...) And for ECF it will be important to find answers for the sustainability of the institutional structure before launching the acquisition of further funds. (MoM DE01)

³⁴ MoM AZ 01/AZ02.

³⁵ MoM AZ 07

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

3.5 Sustainability

The crucial question of any project is if the created benefits are going to last in the long run. In the case of ECF, the question is whether the processes created for community conservation will be strong enough to continue after the 10-year implementation period of the conservation agreements. It is too early to assess the sustainability in the long run. Ten years are a long time and many changes can occur in a quickly developing and to some extent volatile region. The evaluation can thus only collect a few indicators from present situation that would allow a forecast into the future and assess areas that could be further strengthened for a sustainable process.

The outcome level indicators (long term 7-10 years³⁶) refer to 70% success rate of agreements (a certain number of communities can be expected to drop-out due to internal community conflicts/politics or mismanagement) as well as to the success rate of 70% of local development measures (some projects may fail) which are fixed in the CA contracts implemented until the end of the conservation agreement period.

The impact level indicators for the programme are 1.) The population of selected indicator species in protected areas which are interlinked through eco-corridors remains constant by 2020; 2.)The number of conflicts between local communities and protected area administrations in protected areas which are interlinked through ecological corridors do not increase (as compared with 2012).

The first impact level indicator is verified by monitoring of species. In several areas the process of regeneration of target species population has already started. Some of this early success is surely not related to the project and is also not yet scientifically confirmed. However, there are encouraging examples demonstrating a mind-set change.³⁷ The monitoring tools (mobile app, camera traps, expert assessments, community assessments) will show to what extent the species population is growing or remains constant. According to conservation specialists, if hunting/poaching is brought under control the regeneration of target species will be successful.³⁸

The second impact indicator aims at the reduction of encroachment and conflicts with the state Protected Areas (PAs), the expected function of the community conservation areas is to play a buffer and awareness creation role. A successful community conservation should theoretically be beneficial for the PAs and result in less conflicts. However, in practice there are already signs of a 'competition for more effective conservation' between the community areas and the PAs, putting pressure on the PAs. In one case, conflicts between a CA and a National Park (NP) have lately been increasing due to the motivation of ECF care-takers to also monitor encroachment into the NP areas and inform NP management, environmental inspection and ministry level, thus creating uncomfortable situations for the park rangers and administration. The situation needs to be monitored and actively mediated in order not to escalate or end up in a blame game but result in fruitful cooperation.

³⁶ In general 10 years, only in last 4 CAs in Armenia, the period was reduced to 7 years.

³⁷ "We cannot say if there are more animals of the target species / increase in numbers, but what we can say is that there are more encounters in our area, which means that the habitat is more suitable. Before we could see 20-30 red deer for example per year, now we see this number in 2-3 months."(MoM GE 11/ Dertseli)

³⁸ see also MoMs AZ10, GE16, AM01-WWF

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

Stakeholder perceptions of sustainability

The question of what will happen after 10 years has led to interesting discussions in communities and there are controversial opinions among stakeholders. There are pessimistic voices, who believe that nothing will continue, when the flow of funds will stop.³⁹ This opinion can be found in government institutions and some NGOs, where certain people are still convinced of the effectiveness of a "police-type" protection approach and criticize the lack of enforcement capacities (care-takers not carrying guns etc.). Overall, scepticism is highest where the trust in communities is lowest⁴⁰ and also where the scepticism of progress in government institutions is highest⁴¹. A different reason for scepticism in the local government is rather stemming from financial motivation/political deal-making: some mayors replied that when the funds would be stopped the lands would be taken back by the communities or given to someone else for lease or development.⁴² Message: If no further funds - then no sustainability.

At the level of the communities the self-assessment was more optimistic: 'why should we not continue something that brings us benefits?' e.g. the haymaking or the planting of trees that bring socio-economic benefits⁴³. The issue discussed was mainly how to pay the salaries of the care-takers, that would not be paid by an external organization, but community representatives were discussing creative options, how to solve this in future: One suggestion was to install video monitoring of entrances from the office of the community council, another payment of care-takers from government budget etc.⁴⁴ In some project communities, municipal council/governor has already signalled that the local government would be willing to take over the care-takers after the end of the conservation agreement. Of course the situation is not identical in all communities, however in the present situation the optimism is high.⁴⁵ On the other hands, the collective processes are still very new and in many communities the social dynamics may still lead to conflicting issues. This may be

³⁹ See interview R.Devrikyan

⁴⁰ "The mindset of the people is not yet ready for strategic and long-term thinking on maintenance and re-investment of benefits. Unfortunately there is also not enough time to work on the mindset of people to change this. People here think only about the single benefit and use all of it instead of keeping something for re-investment or maintenance. The concern is today's money. Also people believe in verbal contracts if somebody comes, people believe in a handshake and thus sometimes unfair deals are made to the detriment of communities, especially with outside business people, traders or investors. Any project should have enough money and time to work on the change of mindset of people." (MoM AM 09 Civil Voice)

⁴¹ see MoM GE 05 / SPPA

⁴² see Interview Mayor of Areni, AM (R.Devrikyan); & MoM AM 12 (Hors CA)

⁴³ "I guess that after 10 years the population will want to continue the protection, different people are interested in that it works, e.g. the hay making, tourism, year by year protection improves and already now if hunters come from outside the people in the villages are arguing with them. Also other villages are asking to replicate activities, the interest is big." (MoM AM 11 Sisian CA)

⁴⁴ "After 7 years the protection will have improved and all the equipment will be transferred to the communities, if we would have online cameras we could do the monitoring from the community administration. This may be less conservation work as is done now but some part of the work. It is one responsibility of the community to protect Nature, the process is identified and work is done, so the problem of sustainability is also identified, we will have to pay the salaries of the care-takers and I am confident that this can be done in future, this is not a very big financial amount." (MoM AM11 / Sisian CA)

⁴⁵ "I cannot say what will happen in 10 years but I think environmental consciousness has increased in the villages. Last time a deer came into the village and it was not shot but SNP was informed to take it away without harming. The number of brown bear has increased and I believe the attention to the environment has also increased also with the objective to develop eco-tourism." (MoM AZ 01 / Gonaghkend)

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

related to the protection and use restrictions as well as the management of investments, for which people will require supervision/mediation and possibly further encouragement.⁴⁶

It is not uncommon, that the enthusiasm of collective achievements is very high in the beginning of community based development processes. The successful ECF communities are no exception in this regard, they feel that their world is changing for the better and the "Yes we can" factor is palpable. However, the motivation still needs to be sustained, the institutional ties with local and national administrations require strengthening, mediation processes need to be in-built, the quality of implemented activities needs to be ensured, community institutions democratically developed and resilience against politicization improved. Thus, the institutional development process within the ECF-Conservation Agreements (CAs) should be actively managed, not only the compliance with the CAs monitored. This will be relevant for the sustainability of the programme results as well as for the significance as a model for successful, community based, contractual Nature Conservation.

Other general sustainability issues:

At a meta level beyond the programmes influence, the danger of socio-economic crisis situations was mentioned, that could also jeopardize the sustainability of the project, through increased need for hunting and wood cutting. A concern of WWF is related to the increase of Human Wildlife Conflicts (HWC), which goes along with increase of wildlife regeneration, and which may undermine readiness for conservation in the long term.

Another concern is the general vulnerability of Protected Areas / CAs to industrial development, for which currently no prevention or effective mitigation measures exist. The strength of the PA system is not sufficient and there are considerable weaknesses in the establishment and enforcement of ESIA procedures. There is a need for a strategy how to deal with pressures through industrial use and infrastructure development (roads, transmission lines, hydropower plants, mining, tourism resorts and other buildings etc.). This aspect is yet lacking, however the threat for all types of conservation areas is not negligible. An increased positive influence through bilateral Government Consultations has been recommended by stakeholders.⁴⁷

4 Lessons Learned and Recommendations

4.1 Cross Cutting Issues (Gender, Climate Change, Biodiversity/Ecosystem Services, ESMF)

4.1.1 Gender

The ECF programme did not have an explicit gender focus, nevertheless gender aspects were directly or indirectly present in the programme. In the ECF team women are well represented - two out of three ECF country programme managers are women (GE/AZ). At project implementation level, a

⁴⁶ "The big question is: Are the communities able to implement the conservation agreements? It will be good to have a second phase of ECF in order not to leave them alone with this task and strengthen cooperation with the communities, support the existing CAs and extend to other areas as well. Now people are willing to do things and they understand what it means to live in harmony with nature." (MoM GE16 KfW) / see also MoM GE 17 WWF.

⁴⁷ see MoM AM 01 WWF, MoM D3WWF-D

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

woman representative was included in all Regional Working Groups (RWG), there is a higher percentage of women in NGO staff and women actively participated in FPA contests. Several award winners were women e.g. story contest (Return to the village, Saribash/AZ and Bear Cub dancer, Imertubani GE), business contest (Poultry farming, Taratumb/AM), community project (playground, Artavan/AM). However, the majority of winning participants were men. In Georgia there is one woman care-taker and a woman field guard (Zanavi), which shows that it is possible, despite difficult working conditions; all other care-takers are men. Also, in WWF men are in a clear majority. However, from WWF perspective women are believed to be more successful community facilitators than men (irrespective of male or female target group). Reasons given were easier trust building, and softer, less confronting attitude (no alpha-male hierarchy) and more responsible work ethics and better ability to listen.⁴⁸

In the project village communities traditional gender roles and division of tasks are still very much present. The issues of hunting/poaching, fishing, forestry/tree cutting, grazing/shepherding (e.g. most of the activities that could be unsustainable or illegal) as well as most of the protection tasks (as forest fire protection, rangers etc.) are traditionally male activities. Women are traditionally more involved in the softer activities related to natural resources e.g. NTFP / herbs & berries collection, making of preserves etc. Women in public representation and decision making positions are not common at the community level. For establishment of ECF contracts mostly men were involved, as municipality representatives involved in land issues are generally men. Asking the men, why so few women are present in the FGD, the justification was too much workload on the fields and lack of time. Asking the women, they confirmed not being totally excluded from decisions (through lobbying at home), but would for example wish to have additional projects for women groups and individual women business projects to improve their economic situation. Also saving groups would work much better among like-minded women than among men.

A strategy how to raise gender awareness among men would be required to reduce the double or triple burden of women in the long run. Other gender issues as family planning, gender based violence, consequences of seasonal work migration, consequences of alcoholism, unequal workload (double/triple burden for women) were not enquired in the framework of the evaluation and should be part of a more detailed gender analysis.

=>Overall, a recommendation would be to strengthen women involvement in CBOs, women group activities and women business activities (new FPA contests) and make separate meetings with men groups and women groups if joint participation in village councils is not appropriate / feasible. =>Motivating involvement / empowerment for Nature Protection should target both men and women (separately in the beginning, then jointly as appropriate). The use of peer-to-peer trainers from successful communities in new communities should also involve both men and women trainers as well as participants.

⁴⁸ See MoM GE17-WWF

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

4.1.2 Climate Change

In all three countries the awareness of climate change is high. When asked about their observations of changes in weather/climate conditions during the last years, farmers of the project communities were very outspoken. In Armenia, farmers remarked that there is less snowfall, water sources dry up earlier, growth of grass is slower and grazing finishes earlier. According to farmers, the rainfall pattern is more irregular with too wet periods alternating with too dry periods and weather for sowing/planting and harvesting becoming unreliable.⁴⁹ In Azerbaijan, farmers noted that effects of climate change are remarkable in changing seasons for fruit trees (earlier ripening) and only very short time before rotting at the tree (e.g. apples). According to them, drought effects are already visible in spring.⁵⁰ In Georgia similar phenomena are mentioned by communities.⁵¹

With the empowerment, trust and community cohesion created through ECF it would be interesting to continue working with the communities on climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. Several stakeholders from communities mentioned a high interest. One project for installation of thermal solar home systems and photovoltaic systems for public buildings including provision of power to the grid is about to start (ECF & UNDP-GEF-SGP cooperation in Artavan Armenia). The theme of energy efficiency would also find open ears in ECF-communities of all three countries and people expressed readiness to make cash contributions for prioritized investments. => For a potential second phase of ECF, energy efficiency, reliability of water supply, forest/ tree planting and erosion control measures could be potential focus topics of work with existing communities. This could include awareness raising and practical investments into climate change adaptation and resource regeneration.

4.1.3 Biodiversity Conservation Financing / Eco-System Services

The ECF programme has made first steps in direction of bottom-up valuation of conservation prices e.g. assessment of protection cost per hectare (as orientation values for the Conservation Agreements). In the long-term perspective the potentials and risks of such approaches as basis for "eco-system services" assessment and financing could be explored further and the experiences should be capitalized upon in the discussion of climate financing, biodiversity-financing and eco-system services topics. However, it needs to be stated that this aspect was not part of the programme objectives. => A documentation of experiences (challenges and opportunities) for integration into future strategies and programmes of KfW would be interesting

⁴⁹ "Yes of course we see the effects of climate change. It got warmer, before we had 1.5 m of snow in winter, now just 20cm. We had to dig out corridors of snow in the city (Sisian). There is definitely less snowfall. The amount of water is also decreasing, we feel that watering the soil is not as effective, we have to water more, the soil absorbs more water. Also some springs for drinking water disappeared and the vegetation is not as abundant as before. Nature looks like a human being that is a bit ill (like an offended person). In response to climate change we are in transition, we are looking and searching what we should do but we have not found a solution yet. The questions are should we prepare hay or buy hay or bring the animals to the pastures in the mountain area or not. The weather is more irregular. This year beginning of September was cooler and there was more rain and we cannot go and collect the potatoes, there were more rotten potatoes and also some of the pests increased. We think this is also related to the seeds from outside and the pesticides from outside. Before, the animals could graze in the pastures up to mid September, but now already from Mid July the pasture efficiency (growth of grass) decreased dramatically. This year, in Arevis the pastures are still perfect. But if we cannot rely on seasons anymore, when to plan the harvest this is a problem." (MoM AM 15)

⁵⁰ MoM AZ 02.

⁵¹ "We note that the water sources are getting scarce, there is less rain in some periods of the year and less grass and it gets brown earlier, there is less snow than before, we needed to make a channel and we had big problems when the road was not cleaned, but now we had no snow at all or very little. (MoM GE 07)

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

4.1.4 Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF)

ESMF considerations were not formally included in the project set-up (adopted in KfW after 2016). For a future phase, an ESM-check should be included and also applied for existing communities / conservation agreements. This relates for example to improving environmental standards in community road construction (drainage/culverts, road side stabilization, erosion prevention etc. e.g. Persati Mt./GE)⁵², water supply works and issues of competition for irrigation water (e.g. Zangakaton AM), potential impacts of other infrastructure measures and Health & Safety (H&S) (e.g. training in physical works, first aid kits etc). Note: The balance between community ownership/responsibility and external enforcement of ESM standards is sensitive and good facilitation how to bring-in ideas to raise standards would be a key issue. => Environmental and Social-Impact considerations and appropriate mitigation measures should be inbuilt in future programme, corrective measures should be taken in created infrastructures (e.g. erosion prevention at rehabilitated roads etc.)

4.2 Name of the Eco-Corridors -Programme

It was suggested by stakeholders that for a new programme phase the name "Eco-Corridors" should be changed as it would draw too much attention to the wildlife migration aspects and would therefore be less easy to communicate to communities and local government. The wildlife focus was more relevant for the Ministries of Environment. From WWF-AM perspective the name "large conservation landscapes" was suggested in order to strengthen the landscape approach and the community focus.⁵³

4.3 General KfW approach

The ECF project is not only innovative in the Caucasus, but also at KfW level. The conceptual approach based on long-lasting conservation agreements with an implementation period beyond the duration of the KfW programme is unconventional and requires a high amount of trust for a development bank. Furthermore, the participatory methods for facilitation and creation of community ownership implemented within in ECF are to some extent still a niche product in KfW, because the requirements are high compared to the small scale tangible infrastructures created and because the long-term approach does not match very well with the usual aim to produce quick and visible effects.

The participatory approach in ECF is to some extent a niche product in KfW. In participatory approaches, the requirements for facilitation and creation of community ownership are high compared to the small scale tangible infrastructures created, the long-term approach does not match very well with the requirements to produce quick and visible effects and an implementation period

⁵² For the road construction there was no planning by engineers, funds were too low for it, basically it was just levelling, in future road construction engineers could advise the communities, but in ECF it was not big project. But for example in 1995 the people did rehabilitation of the road, but then it was washed away by big rains and one old man said: from where you brought the gravel, the rain brought it back to." We will now try to asphalt all roads in villages, road side plantations could be interesting in alpine zone, otherwise natural regeneration takes place."(Mayor of Adigeni MoM GE 06)

⁵³ "A challenge has also been the name of the programme, Eco Corridors is too complicated to explain and people associate it only with migration of animals. For new proposal " large conservation landscapes" would be more understandable. (MoM AM01-WWF)

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

beyond the programme duration requires a big amount of trust for a donor bank.⁵⁴ On the other hand, from a general perspective, the involvement of the beneficiaries and the creation of ownership are considered to be preconditions for successful development processes, which require a lot of capacity building and a long breath. With the ECF set-up, KfW went into this direction. The programme found a solution for spending small amounts of money, which correspond to the absorption capacity and for giving away control to the people to work on their priorities and to grow with own success stories. The need to focus on development potentials and opportunities instead of focusing on deficits as well as to find innovative solutions and not only minimize risks was also recognized.⁵⁵

From the perspective of this evaluation, a very successful start of community based conservation areas has been made. In a second phase this created partnership should be strengthened. The intensive and successful trust building of ECF I should be used further. Thus, a second phase of ECF programme should use the opportunity not only focus on new areas for a replication of ECF I but also continue the partnership with the existing communities to a) support communities in case of questions or need for mediation related to CAs and b) to strengthen communities in relevant topics as climate change adaptation, sustainable livelihoods and community forestry. The FPA approach could be strategically used as there is a big demand for it from the communities and should be adapted to increase the community contributions, strategic theme setting and as a post-implementation award (e.g. most successful projects are awarded after people have implemented them). A continued partnership would prevent communities from getting disappointed with failures, keep up their motivation and communicate the signal that there is still someone who cares.

4.4 Institutional Set-up WWF and community orientation

WWF is acknowledged to be the only conservation organization with three regional offices and management capacities for a conservation programme at this scale in the South Caucasus.⁵⁶ (see ECF organization chart in Annex). At the WWF-CauPo there is no worry related to the capacities for monitoring of the conservation agreements, especially the wildlife monitoring as well as management and financial monitoring, however detailed procedures still need to be developed. At the level of community engagement (in present communities as well as for potential extension to new communities) capacities are so far only available at the senior management level, who cannot possibly manage every issue in the field. Also, in the long run (10 years +), when at least some of the present senior staff will retire, the staff structure need to be refreshed with personalities, who are able to fill the gap. Tamaz Gamkrelidze, the ECF programme coordinator in WWF and one of the main

⁵⁴ "With ECF, KfW wants to focus rather on development potentials instead of putting development deficits in the foreground. The goal is to create future structures and therefore we are prepared to take certain risks. In the beginning, this required a lot of convincing. This was for example the case with the conservation agreements, which are the core of ECF really, and for which the implementation lasts beyond the programme duration. We need a certain level of trust that this will be complied with and it was somewhat unusual that KfW agreed to this, but very positive of course."(MoM D01-KFW)

⁵⁵ "We institutionalized a monitoring system to be implemented by WWF but overall we have to admit that the programme is situated between the poles of trust vs. control. We are convinced that the project works out well only if the people know the added value of conservation and sustainable use of natural resources and if the practical implementation is carried by the proper interests of the communities. The spirit here is to attempt finding innovative solutions and not only minimize risks. But of course we have to ask ourselves, which mechanisms we have to adopt in order to avoid having to say that after Gopa left nothing worked out anymore."(MoM D01-KFW)

⁵⁶ See MoM D 01-KfW

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

drivers of the approach, who sadly passed away in 2018 and who was remembered by the communities at many occasions during the field visit, has left a void that is not easy to be refilled. It will require a long term strategy, openness and empowerment for younger people to grow into the position of decision makers in the organization.

The experience with ECF has encouraged the institutional process of WWF-CauPo towards stronger community involvement. According to WWF CauPo director, WWF has 10 different project ideas in the pipeline. Among them, four projects will have a strong community based approach, similar to the ECF, which is a positive impact of the project (see Annex). The director of WWF Armenia has integrated parts of the ECF approach in a new project proposal.⁵⁷ The orientation of WWF towards large landscape conservation, community involvement and participatory management is visible in the programme selection and reflects a trend in the overall Nature Conservation discourse. If the trend is durable it will also need to be reflected in the HR development strategy of WWF. The implementation of several new programmes will require a number of additional expert staff with high level community facilitation skills.

An outsourcing of the participation components to independent experts or sub-contracted NGOs is unlikely to be sufficient in the long run, given the importance of the tasks (= core issue) and given the few highly qualified specialists on the market. A learning from ECF and recommendation for the future organization development could be that WWF CauPo and country offices need to invest into in-house staff with socio-economic and community development competence and allow for substantial training on the job. There is a support by WWF-Germany for this organization development strategy.⁵⁸

4.5 Monitoring and Evaluation

The monitoring of the ECF-CAs is the upcoming task for WWF during the next ten years implementation period, which includes 1.) a wildlife monitoring component of the community conservation areas, 2.) a financial and institutional monitoring of the CAs and 3.) a social accompaniment of the community processes and documenting the socio-economic impact.⁵⁹ The wildlife monitoring component is expected to be done with the use of the camera traps and with the "Earth Beat App" that is much appreciated by the care-takers in Armenia, who already got trained in the use of the app and started experimenting with it and reporting necessary improvements to the GIS focal person in WWF Armenia who coordinates the wildlife monitoring. The software should also

⁵⁷ "I already included the integrated landscape planning approach as well as climate change issue already into a proposal for SDC, who asked WWF to develop a new strategy for them. I did however not recommend FPA nor savings accounts, as the project is only on 4 years and it is located in the same landscape as ECF, so we have done FPA already. I suggested for them to produce an integrated landscape management plan. And of course for WWF the wildlife perspective was more important. For some villages which were not focused in the eco-corridor project we would recommend FPA. We did already extend FPA in Dilijan in the framework of WWF TJS and UNDP in a forest project in 2 communities with 40'000 EUR from TJS and 100'000 EUR from UNDP. UNDP was very flexible to adopt the competitive approach. So far there are no other examples for FPA replication as far as I know."

⁵⁸ see interview WWF 14.10.19

⁵⁹"Now we have 10 years of conservation agreement implementation, during which WWF has to implement the monitoring system, we will do annual monitoring, check the conservation agreements and talk with the communities if something is not correctly implemented so that they can correct things. If something goes completely wrong against conservation (what I do not expect) we can cancel the agreement and block the funds. But I don't expect this to happen, communities who have the contract are happy and they are also happy to respect the agreement because it is for their own benefit." (MoM GE 17 - WWF)

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

be used to monitor HWC.⁶⁰ In Georgia care-takers were very recently trained on the same software, no experiences were available during this evaluation. In Azerbaijan, a similar software is in process of programming. In all three countries, care-takers will be trained to use camera traps.⁶¹ According to WWF, additional external experts (or additional internal staff) will be hired for the wildlife monitoring, checking of all maps, monitoring of land use in the CCAs etc. in order to assess the change in populations of target species at the end of the CA period.⁶² Note: There is still a need to explain in some Ministries of Environment why the target species approach was chosen, why it should also be used in monitoring and why a monitoring of the entire Red-Book does not make sense.⁶³

In terms of monitoring of management arrangements, WWF plans to annually review the performance of the CAs, audit the saving accounts, follow up on the community engagement and discuss potential issues with the communities. A clear action plan for this task including schedules needs to be developed. In case of bad implementation, WWF proposes to discuss the reasons, ask for corrective measures and in the last resort block the further instalments. However, WWF does not expect this to happen.

For the social accompaniment of the community processes (e.g. a follow up on the livelihood components, a further support in fundraising activities and a management of community processes e.g. social dynamics, expectations and potential conflicting issues should be made. In this regard, WWF hopes for a second phase of the ECF programme, as neither budget from ECF 1 nor capacities are sufficient for this tasks. However, WWF should not wait until a second phase of ECF materializes. Looking into the social dynamics in the existing CAs, there are already now several cases that require more or less intensive backstopping. These are so far (to the knowledge of the evaluation team) not big issues, but issues that might absorb a lot of energy of the concerned persons, which could be invested into the project in a better way. => It is suggested, that all communities (CAs) should be visited by WWF in 2020 to assess if the agreements are on track or if there are issues to be dealt with. This would also make the transition between ECF management and WWF monitoring clear to the communities. Also a grievance mechanism (communication mechanism), where communities can ask for support or raise complaints should be created and made transparent for the communities.

Evaluation

A mid-term and final evaluation after the 10 years implementation of conservation contracts should be planned for and should include 1.) a wildlife monitoring component 2.) a financial and

⁶⁰ "We should also document the Human Wildlife conflicts with the Earth Beat app. Especially there are issues with bears and people get very angry as the number of bears is increasing." (MoM AM 11 -Gnishik Care Takers).

⁶¹ "Now we need indicator based monitoring of number of animals transiting through the corridors to the Protected Areas, this will prove the success. For this camera traps analysis external experts will be used. For camera trap installations we need monitoring and training of the local people. In WWF-AZ we have Aserchin Muradov who is camera trapping expert, we will use him to train the care-takers" (MoM AZ10- WWF)

⁶² For the monitoring system we should hire experts or have somebody in WWF who is responsible, which is a big task, because all maps and landscape plans need to be checked in reality. The monitoring is an important component, without good monitoring in the field a programme cannot be successful. (MoM GE 17 -WWF)

⁶³ "I would have liked to have the corridor more expanded to cover more areas and also the focus on species to have all Red List species covered. The areas of rare species should have been considered. This should be mentioned in the evaluation report as a recommendation, that other areas should be focused to represent different types of areas." (MoM AM04 -MoE)

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

institutional management assessment, 3.) social assessment of stakeholder perspectives and wider socioeconomic impact.

4.6 Human Wildlife Conflicts (HWC) and mitigation measures

With the foreseen recovery of wildlife numbers, also the numbers of predators and consequently the number of damages will increase. In some areas this is already the case. In Georgia killing of livestock by wolves is the main issue, in Armenia and Azerbaijan bears are responsible for most of the damages, mainly to orchards and beehives. This development is expected, however suitable mitigation measures need to be tested in the field, otherwise the reaction of people may have negative impacts on the conservation objective, especially concerning reduction of poaching.

From the perspective of MoE in Azerbaijan, HWC are not the fault of the wild animals, but of humans carelessly entering their territories.⁶⁴ Whilst from eco-system perspective this may be true, local people who lose their income do not see it the same way. Beekeepers have started using scaring techniques, as battery radios - full blast, or village Youth going around during the night with their motorcycles, expensive electric fences, use of dogs etc.⁶⁵ At least in the short term this may help, but in the long run there is a need for prevention strategies with more effective measures.

Compensation schemes are often viewed with much scepticism. In Azerbaijan an official insurance scheme had been piloted, but the proofs to be delivered and the related bureaucracy were not attractive to farmers.⁶⁶ Also in Armenia people were not convinced because of possibilities of cheating. In Georgia, a community solidarity scheme for wildlife damages has been implemented including a contribution per ensured cattle, the first damages were compensated this year and the beneficiaries are totally convinced.⁶⁷ Also neighboring villages, who have heard about the scheme, want to have a similar scheme and more farmers want to adhere.⁶⁸ This is however creating a discussion in the community, how much new members should pay and if they should have the same rights.⁶⁹ In this regard, some further consulting and community facilitation is recommended.

Another positive impact on reduction of HWC was experienced in Georgia with the employment of field guards who make sure that cattle is not going into the forest and into strict protection zones.

⁶⁴ "We have Human Wildlife Conflicts (HWC) but few cases. Our bears are well behaved, normally it is the fault of people, bears do not go to conflict first e.g. bee-keepers take the bee-hives into the forest into the territory of the bears...and even then we have only few cases of destruction of beehives. The main issue is the unsustainable urbanisation of villages and not leaving sufficient wildlife buffer zones in between villages to make space for wildlife. We had one case of bear attack when a human entered the forest to collect wild fruits in the bear territory. Public awareness is lacking here, animals are to be considered as neighbours and people should see wildlife protection as a resource."(MoM AZ04 - MoE)

⁶⁵ In terms of human wildlife conflicts we have no problems with bears, now the bear season has started, but they get a lot of fruits and berries so there is less appetite for cattle. MOM GE09 -Mokhe)

⁶⁶ see MoM AZ09-MoE

⁶⁷ "We had three cases of attacks of cattle by wolves of which two had the insurance and were compensated and one did not have and was not compensated."(MoM GE11 -Dertseli)

⁶⁸ "There is no conflict with bears, but wolves have killed 15 cattle this year. We see that in Dertseli with the field guards there was no cattle killed, this is also incentive for us (to sign the conservation agreement)."(MoM GE 12 / Kikibo)

⁶⁹ "Here we have the insurance / solidarity scheme, which is still very new and we are still debating how we can take new members and how to adapt it. But one farmer has lost one cow to a wolf and it was ensured and he got compensation. There is no risk of cheating, as he was even informed by his neighbours and they made a video of the dead cattle, so the information is very clear." (MOM GE09 -Mokhe)

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

The fact of not entering the forest areas and the fact of being accompanied, reduced the attacks on cattle considerably, according to farmers' observation this year.⁷⁰

The experiences from the HWC compensation solidarity scheme as well as the technical measures to be implemented in the UNDP co-financed project on prevention of HWC in Armenia (Artavan) will form a body of knowledge of what to do against HWC. These experiences should be accompanied, well documented and shared as a learning material.

4.7 Future Area Selection & Legal Status

The identified corridors, target species and communities are assessed to be suitable, neither government agencies nor development or conservation organizations criticized the choices made. However, during the project not the entire area of the three corridors could be covered, due to lack of funds, capacities, time etc. (=> It also was never attempted or set as an objective). The fact that parts of the corridors are not yet covered would invite a continuation and extension of the project into these areas. Also, villages in the corridors, which did not want to participate or could not participate in the ECF, are now demanding to be included in the project and existing communities want to continue with further activities, especially FPA community and business contests. An extension to other areas and replication of ECF-model landscape planning approaches would also be of interest.⁷¹

In the initial stage, WWF had a priority for Lori-Mingachauri corridor in Azerbaijan, but the Ministry of Environment (MENR) wanted to select the greater Caucasus Range, which was complied with in the end. With the change in the Ministry a few years ago, the Lori-Mingachauri area would probably be a future candidate for a new corridor in Azerbaijan.

In Armenia it would be interesting to fully cover the existing central corridor as a priority and improve the linkages between the ECF community conservation areas and the various lease areas (e.g. FPWC), the hunting areas and the state Protected Areas. A future possibility could be a Northern corridor.

In Georgia the extension of the present corridor to Khulo, Shuakhevi and Keda municipalities (FPA areas) to extend the protection corridor to Adjara would be relevant, on the other hand it would also be interesting to test new corridor areas with different eco-systems and cultural landscapes;⁷²

An issue to be discussed is the future formalization of status of the community areas, which would strengthen the legal status. Two categories e.g. "Protected Landscape" (IUCN Cat. 5) or "Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources" (IUCN Cat. 6) would be relevant. The approach should be based on the demand of the communities which would require competent facilitation and explanation of potential consequences.⁷³

⁷⁰ "There is also quite good monitoring of the field guards, the guards of the different communities are helping each other to prevent the cattle to go into the forest and this has decreased the losses. During the last years we had up to 10 losses, this year only one".(MOM GE09 - Mokhe)

⁷¹ See Chapter "Relevance".

⁷² "We would recommend to continue ECF where there is a need in existing corridors and also extend to new corridors in order to close the gaps. It would also be interesting to go into a new corridor in a totally new area to see other examples and other habitats, e.g. to compare lowland and highland, grassland and forest." (SPPA; MoM GE 05)

⁷³ for more detailed arguments and discussion see MoM GE 03/MEPA, GE 05/SPPA, GE17/WWF, AZ 10/WWF

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

4.8 Cooperation with other programmes

4.8.1 Cooperation with WWF-Germany

The cooperation of WWF-CauPo and WWF-Germany in the "Leopard Conservation Programme" has already a long tradition before ECF. Some successful elements, e.g. the idea of the care-takers were adopted by ECF. From perspective of WWF-Germany the need for increased cooperation between the different projects is also encouraged as well as the cooperation of the WWF / ECF bio-monitoring programme with Humboldt University. There is a strong commitment by WWF-Germany and no plans of withdrawal from the Caucasus programme.⁷⁴

4.8.2 Cooperation with other funding agencies

In Armenia several co-financing agreements with UNDP/GEF and with SDA (supported by SDC) were already implemented others are in preparation. So far there is no donor cooperation in Azerbaijan. In Georgia there is an up-coming cooperation with Slovenian Centre for International Development and Cooperation (CMSR) on forest management in Adigeni and in terms of livelihood development and agriculture there could be possibilities to work with SDC.

However, too much co-funding is also risky. It appears not easy to find a good balance of co-financing. There is a risk that bigger amount of funds are more attractive for any type of misuse. Also the absorption capacity of communities for self-implemented action (ownership) is not that high, there is a risk of financial chaos caused by too much influx of money and complicated co-financing arrangements (which neither local NGOs nor municipalities can manage e.g. case of Hors village / Armenia). And last but not least, the risk exists that the visibility of objectives of ECF focus is blurred by other bigger funding arrangements e.g. in public infrastructure or agriculture without the Nature conservation component. These risks should be managed through awareness creation, capacity building and detailed management arrangements and clear processes.

4.8.3 Cooperation with other conservation organizations

According to WWF there is a potential for a stronger cooperation of WWF with local Nature Conservation organizations doing complementary work.⁷⁵ Apparently, the relationship of WWF and FPWC in Armenia has improved, however there are issues of concerns in the approach, e.g. the release of bears that have been in captivity for several years and which were released in proximity of a tourism area (Noravank / Gnishik PL). This issue needs to be addressed in order not to increase HWC with potentially fatal consequences. Other cooperation in terms of conservation, information exchange, monitoring is encouraged.

4.8.4 Cooperation with CNF/SPPA/TJS

A representative of each organization/programme is member of ECF steering committee and generally aware about the programme. In preparation of the FPA phase, there was a strong cooperation between ECF and TJS including trainings, study tours and input by TJS international facilitator. Nevertheless, a wish for more exchange was mentioned e.g. through a regular thematic

⁷⁴ MoM D3 WWF-D

⁷⁵ "We should cooperate with partners, who are doing complementary work e.g. activities between WWF and FPWC in Armenia need to be coordinated better. FPWC sometimes have very ambitious ideas like leopard introduction etc. so there are some tensions and the also started working in Karabakh, which we cannot do as WWF. But in terms of sustainable landuse what they are doing in neighbouring areas to our CA areas is complementary." (MoM GE17 WWF)

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

platform. There is also the wish for stronger cooperation e.g. in development of monitoring software/programmes. The development of joint strategy for legalisation of Community Conservation Areas as well as the sharing of Lessons Learned with Protected Landscape Programmes in Georgia (Tusheti / Aragvi) could be a further area for increased cooperation.

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

4.9 Summary recommendations

Strategic recommendations to WWF

- The monitoring phase should go beyond just monitoring but increase the partnership with communities; the perspective would be to consider the local people and CBOs as partners not only as beneficiaries;
- Maintain the partnership with the communities, be open for questions and concerns of community representatives and encourage good results. Develop a caring attitude for the people's livelihoods.
- Develop cooperation channels and occasions for PA rangers and CCA care-takers to avoid unhealthy competition ("blame game on lack of control of hunting"); develop a conflict resolution mechanism in case of high-level antagonistic interests; it should be possible that care-takers / community leaders to inform WWF staff in case of problems without having to fear sanctions from WWF (monitoring role for CA implementation), deal with the potential conflict of interest in a productive way;
- Strategically plan for formalization of CCAs: If communities want to promote formalization of legal status of their area they should be supported => suitable Cat 5 or Cat 6 in process of status legalization; Facilitation to explain pros- and cons is needed;
- Networking with other conservation agencies to share experiences e.g. cooperation with FPWC on the non-sense of releasing bears from captivity in tourism areas but also on cooperation options in neighboring CCAs and PAs;
- Development of approach and methods to prevent and mitigate human wildlife conflicts (HWC), Document experiences with prevention and compensation measures from existing CAs. Exchange with other conservation organizations e.g. Nacres/GE ; FPWC / AM and other.

Technical recommendations to WWF for CA implementation / monitoring:

- Continuous trainings in community communication and facilitation as well as additional exposure visit / training on the job;
- Carry out a systematic needs assessment in existing CA communities during site visits for additional monitoring equipment e.g. camera traps etc;
- The socio-economic part of the "menu of measures" could be reviewed and the environmental nexus (in theme setting) strengthened;
- Define clear responsibilities and task descriptions for community tasks during CA implementation phase and employ additional qualified staff and develop an action plan and schedule for the social monitoring in the CA partner communities;
- Make periodical visits to CA communities to help in conflict management / mediation in case of community problems, and specifically for care-takers. WWF should provide regular

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

backstopping support (showing interest, listening to concerns, solving problems etc.) to communities and specifically to care-takers. They should feel that they are not left alone.

Strategic recommendations for a second phase of the programme:

- In general there is a need to increase the number of qualified experts in participatory work with communities in the South Caucasus. Trainings for NGOs in RRA/PRA and exposure visits to participatory projects are recommended. Organize peer-to-peer training tour for community facilitators and WWF to look at specific examples of ECF that were done differently in the three countries.
- The importance of WWFs role in negotiations and partnerships at government level should be taken into account if considering an independent fund set-up
- The community forest relation should be addressed. On the community level issues are fire-wood and construction timber. Forest programmes with state organizations may require patience until the legal and institutional reform processes are well settled. Lobbying for community involvement in local forestry (when the time will be ripe for it) should be planned for strategically. In ECF areas with high forest coverage, access to fuel wood and construction timber for villages should be improved as integral part of sustainable local livelihoods and combined with alternative energy, energy efficiency, housing improvement projects (example Kikibo GE, Artavan AM, Parsidan AZ)⁷⁶.
- Strengthen cooperation with CNF and donors for community approaches in buffer zones of Protected Areas, e.g. FPA contests for environmental and socio-economic benefits for communities; Develop exchange of experiences with Protected Landscape projects e.g. Aragvi PL / Tusheti PL.
- Develop multiplier effects. Disseminate ECF experiences to inform stakeholders on government and donor community level. Prepare specific presentations for governors and staff in ECF project area to share project experiences and explain community conservation discourse to them so that they are aware, knowledgeable on the topic and can act as multipliers (especially young and dynamic governors); also individual presentations can make sense + similar approach to municipality heads (especially if new); Thematic capacity building of local government representatives in terms of climate change discourse and activity options. Document all small scale projects from ECF (FPA and CAs) successes as well as failures to draw lessons learned; prepare case studies of best-practices.
- Co-financing arrangements should be promoted with care and considerations of the pro- and cons. CAs should be well established and procedures clear, otherwise there is a risk of financial confusions and blurring of conservation objectives in the race for more funds; External funding needs to be adapted to absorption capacities / finance handling capacities of communities;

⁷⁶ "There are some burned forest areas and it would be good to take small saplings and reforest this area. However we cannot do it because we would need a permission from the NFA / forest fund. In FPA we have grafted 300 apple trees, which was successful. Also a fruit tree nursery would be good." (MoM GE 11, Dertseli)

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

- Tourism focus should be handled very carefully and under consideration of sustainability principles;
- Climate Change, Gender Mainstreaming and ESMF considerations should be systematically included.

Methodological recommendations for a second phase of the programme:

- Additional FPA contests on environmental & socio-economic benefits for communities should be implemented. Communities should continue to develop their priorities. RRA could be done more intensively / mix of national and international consultant team for an improved social baseline and pre-identification of opportunities; second stage of RRA after selection of areas to work on identified priorities together with the selected villages (e.g. nexus of environmental & socio-economic benefits).
- A piloting of post-implementation contests (with several components) in villages where other contests have been successful (piloting adaptation of Pacha Mama model) is recommended.
- Develop FPA contests (alternative energy, thermal or photovoltaic solar, pico scale hydro-power (approx 100kW), fuel efficient stoves, house insulations, water harvesting, erosion prevention, river cleaning and protection, waste management, other resource regeneration actions) / assess options for post-implementation awards to increase outreach. Use of community level peer-to-peer trainers from successful examples will be beneficial.
- Develop FPA contests for women business projects (for family livelihood and community benefits); Conduct gender mainstreaming / awareness training for community facilitators; Conduct separate Women meetings to assess women needs and development ideas and priorities; Strengthening of affinity women groups (e.g. revolving fund pilot); Support for women-care-takers;
- Support existing communities (those who did not yet benefit) with trainings for financial literacy, financial management, interest rate calculation, understanding concept of return on investment, price determination for products and services=> not only microfinance but economic capacity building is required⁷⁷: Support CA-communities with trainings for proposal writing / fundraising, establish contact to donor organizations as well as government programmes, governance of the CBO and organisational development
- Support tourism relevant CA-communities with service trainings and basic knowledge for tourism investments, product development, price setting for services, develop small scale destination approach; develop small scale eco tourism strategies & action plans. Trainings should be linked to practical implementation, not theoretical.

⁷⁷"A proposal writing training is very important because when the project will finish we need to have the know-how to raise funds to continue the project. Also the school children involvement in environmental education is very important and a tourism training and an English training and computer skills"(MoM GE 07-Khevasheni).

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

5 Conclusion

The evaluation has looked at the 5 years' set-up period of the Eco-Corridors Programme. Based on the planned approach (logframe, workplans, assumptions) the impacts of the implemented or contracted measures and the contribution to the general objectives were analysed. The evaluation findings were structured according to the DAC criteria (Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency and Sustainability). Cross-Cutting Issues (Gender, Climate Change, ESMF), institutional set-up and management structures as well as cooperation arrangements with other conservation organizations/programmes were examined. In view of a future continuation and scaling-up of the programme in a second phase, lessons learned were gathered and recommendations are provided.

The achievements of the different output areas (1-4) were assessed with a perspective on results as well as processes and with a mix of quantitative and qualitative information mainly gathered through analysis of project documents/reports and stakeholder interviews and beneficiary focus groups (FGD). The perspectives of different stakeholders on the successes and challenges of programme approaches, methodologies and activities are highlighted throughout the study. Of course much of the information provided by stakeholders are their subjective views and despite intensive cross-checking there may also be other contrasting perspectives and contradicting opinions. This makes community work challenging and intense. However, as the programme has put local people and their priorities in the centre, also the evaluation has tried to make people's voices heard as much as possible.

Overall the programme (set-up phase) is considered to be a successful, innovative and relevant programme throughout all stakeholder categories.

A few strengths of the country specific implementations shall be highlighted in the following:

- In Armenia the involvement of WWF in the programme was very high and has shaped the programme, as much in relation to communities and local NGOs as in relation to the Ministry of Environment and other donor organizations (e.g. UNDP). The programme was based in some aspects on former WWF projects and NGO activities. The co-financing schemes are very much appreciated by the communities as more resources were made available for implementation of further socio-economic projects. The up-coming activities on solar energy, eco-tourism and prevention of human wildlife conflicts will create interesting models. The downside of the successful NGO approach is the impression of lower ownership among communities in some areas (e.g. political threats to cancel lease contracts to increase pressure for more financial resources). Also equipment sharing & management arrangements and contractual agreements need to be monitored more closely due to the tri-partite agreements and the consolidated community set-up in Armenia. All modifications of contracts and practices should be documented in detail in order to avoid future conflicts and misunderstandings. From WWF perspective the position as an intermediary NGO is not always easy. It could be interesting to increasingly build direct partnerships with the communities in order to make sure that local communities understand the role of WWF and not consider it as a donor organization with unlimited financial resources.
- In Azerbaijan the specific adaptation of the FPA approach led to a considerable number of success stories combining environmental protection and livelihoods. The theme setting was

Eco-Corridor Fund for the Caucasus (ECF)

Partnership for living landscapes

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia

more innovative and the implementation more strongly monitored than suggested in the FPA manual, which led to a high identification and motivation for the project among community members. The communication and awareness raising with governors done by the project led to substantial government investments as well as to the termination of old land leases to rich outsiders to the benefit of protection zones managed by local communities. Additionally, the awareness raising with the general public was very successful (video displays in the metro of Baku and on giant screen in front of the Ministry of Environment plus the facebook pages of CBOs) and has increased the visibility of the project beyond the project areas. However, the relations between state PAs and community conservation areas and the management of power relations and adverse high level interests needs to be accompanied further. For this, care-takers and community leaders need further strengthening and specific capacity building.

- In Georgia, the focus on traditional, sustainable land use practices including investment in machinery & equipment, access improvement as well as functioning use agreements was successfully implemented in communities, which led to strong community ownership of the project. The investments in haymaking had very positive results (communities were proud to report results of 1500 and 2000 additional bales of hay) which has increased people's livelihood security directly, whilst reducing pressure of overgrazing and maintaining high biodiversity alpine meadows. The transition of ownership status from State Land to Community Land through long-term lease agreements (if finally successful) is considered to be a game changing factor for community control of the land specifically in Georgia, which has a potential for extension in the long-term. The concept of field-guards (additionally to the care-takers) led to a better grazing management control and prevented HWC in the implementing communities. The solidarity scheme for compensation of HWC is an innovative concept which has a high potential for further development at national and international level. It will be interesting for the future to increase the nexus of environmental and socio-economic benefits and systematically include environmental impact mitigation measures (ESMF considerations e.g. in road construction) into the implemented activities.

With a ten years implementation period of the conservation agreements yet to come, an assessment of outcome and impact indicators and sustainability of the conservation agreements would be too early at this stage. Stakeholders are very committed at present and in several aspects a further accompaniment is recommended in order to strengthen a sustainable functioning of the community conservation areas even beyond the period of the conservation agreements. There is a lot of scope to use the enthusiasm in the communities for further activities that are combining environmental and socio-economic benefits (Climate change adaptation, alternative energy, natural resource regeneration etc.). There is also a lot of scope for documentation and dissemination of experiences as well as for capacity building of local conservation experts in all aspects of community facilitation and for further empowerment of local stakeholders. A second phase of the programme is recommended.