

# The project investments in North Albania as a tool to approach and implement the objectives of National Strategy of Biodiversity

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## Abstract

The high diversity of ecosystems and habitats enables the sustainability of high levels of biological diversity in Albania. Although Albania is rich in habitat and species diversity, the country is facing loss of biodiversity as a result of synergistic effect of numerous ecological factors. Land conversion resulting in the habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation is arguably the single most significant factor responsible for the endangerment of species in North Albania. Habitat loss and degradation come primarily as the result of deforestation and desertification of arable land. Most of river parts in Albanian coastal lowland are in eutrophic to polytrophic conditions due to the high content of nutrients, nitrogen and phosphorus. Strong erosion in deforested watershed areas contributes to the high amount of total suspended soil indicators. Overexploitation and unsustainable use of Biodiversity are mainly related to unsustainable forestry, fisheries and hunting activities. The paper is presenting and analyzing through case studies the results of some projects and other new investments plans linked with the biodiversity Conservation in North Albania. Albania has a new Strategy for the Biodiversity some actions plans in North Albania aims the direct investments in rehabilitation of natural habitats and the reduction of factors that influence the biodiversity degradation. Also some plans for investments in a sustainable use of land and services in the ecosystems in North Albania are presented.

**Keywords:** biodiversity, habitat, land use, eutrophic, sustainable use, ecosystem services.

## Introduction

The high diversity of ecosystems and habitats (marine and coastal ecosystems, wetlands, river deltas, sand dunes, lakes, rivers, Mediterranean shrubs, broadleaf-, conifer- and mixed forests, alpine and subalpine pastures and meadows, and high mountain ecosystems) enables the sustainability of high levels of biological diversity in Albania. Approximately 30% of all European Flora occur in Albania. There are 27 endemic and 160 sub endemic species of vascular plants, which have a special protection importance for the country. There are some 91 globally threatened species found in Albania. These include the Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*), and the Sturgeon (*Acipenser sturio*) for which Albania is a country of particularly critical importance.

The Red List of endangered species of Albania is elaborated using the IUCN criteria. Threatened species according to IUCN criteria and Red List of Albanian Fauna and Flora consist of 36 mammal, 117 bird, 20 reptilian, 2 amphibian and 23 species of fish. Although Albania is rich in habitat and species diversity, the country is facing loss of biodiversity as a result of synergistic effect of numerous ecological factors. The main ones to be mentioned are: infrastructural development, urbanization and tourism, deforestation, hunting, fishing, soil erosion, energy and mining as the main sectors with great impacts on the biological diversity. Water pollution is also a factor that poses a risk to the biological diversity.

Alteration of the natural flow regimes of rivers and streams and their floodplains and wetlands is recognized as a major factor contributing to loss of biological diversity and ecological function in aquatic ecosystems, including floodplains. The habitat loss and degradation come primarily as the result of deforestation and desertification of arable land. Strong erosion in deforested watershed areas contributes to the high amount of total suspended soil indicators. Most of river parts in Albanian coastal lowland are in eutrophic to polytrophic conditions due to the high content of nutrients, nitrogen and phosphorus. Overexploitation and unsustainable use are mainly related to unsustainable forestry, fisheries and hunting activities. Invasive alien species are not recognized as a major threat to biodiversity in Albania yet, although no thorough research has been done so far mainly due to the lack of human and financial resources.

## Material and Methods

The article is concerned as a review of some important projects implemented in North Albania for the protection of the biodiversity. It was used the analytical and comparative method. Are given some recommendations based on the principles of sustainable development and sustainable use of lands in order to see the biodiversity as a economical services for the economy of peoples living near natural or protected areas.

## Results

A lot of awareness projects are implemented in Albania and especially in North Albania for the protection of the biodiversity and endangered species. Awareness campaigns and studies, bibliography and the plan for the protection of the biodiversity in Shkodra Lake is compiled recently. But the major projects linked with the investments for biodiversity protection are supported from the CEPF. It started mainly in early 2013, focusing on all the three strategic directions of CEPF investment to minimize the negative effects of coastal areas and to establish the sustainable management of water catchments and the wise use of water resources. Some important steps and initiatives were linked with the improvement conservation and protection status of 44 priority key biodiversity areas.

CEPF (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Found) investment in Albania has made it possible for civil society organizations to help under-resourced local institutions in thinking of biodiversity conservation measures through sustainable use of fresh water resources in Ohrid lake, along the Shkumbini, and Drin River. CEPF grantees have invested considerable amount of energy and resources using also different innovative approaches to involve local stakeholders more actively in development

of sustainable livelihood activities and ensure their own survival, but also survival of threatened biodiversity around them.

Some important initiatives took place that influence country's environmental regulations:

CEPF supported ASPBM (partnering with other NGOs in Albania) to advocate for the adoption of a Law on moratorium of the hunting in Albania, extending the existing 2-year hunting ban in Albania for additional 5 years. With complete ban of hunting at least some wild animal populations are expected to recover until law regulation that goes hand in hand with the ban is renewed and applied in practice.

New Management plan for Skadar Lake National Park (LSNP) that was supported by IUCN and Green Home in a CEPF funded project on Montenegrin side was harmonized with the preparation of zoning proposal on the Albanian side. The project facilitated dialogue and cooperation between natural resource users and competent authorities to improve the conservation efforts while securing the livelihoods of local communities depending on natural resources.

Setting of a network called Trans-boundary alliance for conservation of subterranean fauna was initiated by Society for Cave biology, involving organizations, institutions and individuals aiming at research and protection of underground fauna and involving not only stakeholders from Albania but from the wider Balkans region. Similarly MIO-ECSDE, an international organization from Greece launched formation of two formal networks in the five riparian countries of the Drin/Drin watershed.

Act4 Drin Alliance – aiming at coordinating and strengthening NGO participation in the upcoming policy developments in the region driven by the Drin MoU implementation process, and enhancing cooperation and networking among and between regional, national and grassroots NGOs in the Drin Basin, and Act4 Drin Young Ambassadors – aiming at promoting the protection of freshwater ecosystems in the Drin River Basin.

CEPF investment in Albania has supported information sharing between grantees in a number of different ways, including the publication of books and posters; the organization of local seminars and trainings for local specialists within and beyond project areas; and the arrangement of study tours to the KBA-s (Key Biodiversity Areas). A diverse range of approaches, including trainings, information sharing events, project websites, technical documents, media, printed materials, workshops and seminars, and knowledge exchange visit were used to raise awareness on KBAs.

## Discussion and Recommendations

During the implementation of these projects we realised that there were a lot of impacts for the biodiversity protection starting from the good knowledge for the areas and their biodiversity and the strong link with the biodiversity conservation and awareness of people living in protected areas. The projects were a good experience for people and for the biodiversity too. The communities are more aware for the values of species, for the services that traditional and medical plants could give, for the good values of flora and fauna living in the forest of North Albania. The most important initiative was the involvement of the business in good practices for the management of the biodiversity with environmental friendly investments. Strong collaboration with other institutions like Universities and Research institutes working in the field of biodiversity protection is considered a very strong point for the investments on biodiversity protection. The real situation of flora and fauna and the status of each

endangered species as important during the management of protected areas and mainly protected species and key habitats.

The question how to manage some natural values and potentials like Alps, Shkodra Lake, and other water ecosystems in the Mediterranean region brings concrete discussions and concrete things in practice, it is needed more collaboration between investors and the public, more cross border cooperation and synergy between donors and investors, synergy between local actors and civil society organizations. The investments need to stimulate the ecotourism in areas with values of biodiversity. Civil society should assist the private sector in order to adopt the sustainable business practices in coastal marine areas. Civil society can undertake alternative economic activities environmentally and biodiversity friendly, can promote the traditional practice for biodiversity conservation, encourage business in using the tradition and can promote traditional agriculture and agribusiness. Linked with the education and promotion process in some activities is very important the involvement of schools in activities and to promote the natural values of Key Biodiversity Areas and sensitize the community living in the areas for the good management of natural resources. The lobbying process including ministry of education and schools in teaching the best theory and practices related to the biodiversity conservation.

Civil society can spread more knowledge on biodiversity, KBA and priorities for conservation habitats and species, realize good monitoring and research in the field, can do the good the evaluation of the indicators for the biodiversity and the update the results of research studies on biodiversity and monitor the law implementation. Which belong to the scientific research for ecosystem services it is good to use TIK (Technology of Information) in mapping and planning. For the capacity building component is good to have more knowledge and skills for stakeholders during planning period, to build capacities on biodiversity conservation methods and create manuals for farmers, land users and hunters, business, etc for ecosystem services and their management. Also in the priorities of the National strategy for the Biodiversity protection in Albania are highlighted important priorities with objectives that should be taken into consideration. Also a lot of these important priorities are in coherence with the strategy of critical ecosystem partnership found.

1. Support civil society to engage stakeholders in demonstrating integrated approaches for the preservation of biodiversity in coastal areas.

Engage local stakeholders in conservation actions that address threats to key elements of biodiversity in priority KBAs in the coastal zone.

Engage private sector stakeholders to adopt sustainable practices that deliver positive impacts for conservation in priority KBAs (Key Biodiversity Areas) in the coastal zones.

Support civil society to engage with local or national governments to mainstream biodiversity conservation into integrated coastal zone management, land-use and development planning processes.

2. Support the sustainable management of water catchments through integrated approaches for the conservation of threatened freshwater biodiversity.

Enhance the knowledge base on freshwater biodiversity and the importance of freshwater ecosystem services.

Take action to reduce threats and improve management of selected sites in priority freshwater catchments with the participation of local stakeholders.

Engage with government, private sector and other stakeholders to support integrated river basin management practices that reduce threats to biodiversity in priority CMZs (Critical Marine Zones).

3. Promote the maintenance of traditional land use practices necessary for the conservation of Mediterranean biodiversity in priority corridors of high cultural and biodiversity value.

Support local communities to increase the benefit they receive from maintaining and enhancing traditional, biodiversity-friendly land-use and agricultural practices.

Promote awareness of the value of traditional, biodiversity-friendly land-use practices among local community and government decision makers, to secure their recognition and support.

Encourage business actors in the trade chain to support and promote traditional, biodiversity-friendly land-use practices.

4. Strengthen the engagement of civil society to support the conservation of plants that are critically endangered or have highly restricted ranges.

Increase knowledge and skills to support assessment and planning for the conservation of plants, and foster the emergence of a new generation of young professionals in plant conservation.

Support integration of plant conservation into the management of protected areas.

Support innovative actions for the conservation of important populations of plants, working with land owners and managers.

5. Strengthen the regional conservation community through the sharing of best practices and knowledge among grantees across the hotspot.

Support regional and thematically-focused learning processes for CSOs and stakeholders.

Support grantees to understand and engage with international conventions and processes.

6. Provide strategic leadership and effective coordination of CEPF investment through a regional implementation team.

Build a constituency of civil society groups working across institutional and political boundaries toward achieving the shared conservation goals described in the ecosystem profile.

Act as a liaison unit for relevant networks throughout the Mediterranean to harmonize investments and direct new funding to priority issues and sites.

All these recommendations serve to fulfill the main goal of the Albanian Strategy for Biodiversity to stop losing the biodiversity and to stop the degradation of ecosystem services. The Albanian Strategy of Biodiversity aims to contribute also in the protection of the global biodiversity. It is all possible when the Albanian law and UE laws are fully implemented and the strong pressure to the biodiversity is minimized.

The Albanian ecosystems should be restored in a biological harmony and the policies for the protection of the biodiversity are effective. All these objectives have the fully approach with priorities investments for the biodiversity protection of CEPF (Critical Ecosystem Partnership Found).

Integrate the politics for biodiversity protection in all relevant sectors in order that the national strategy for the biodiversity protection is taken into consideration during the decision making process.

Strengthen and support the actors included in the social function of the biodiversity.

Involve the private sector in biodiversity protection.

Encourage the sustainable land use, the sustainable use of genetic resources for food and in agriculture.

Encourage the system of certification of forest in order to have the sustainable use of forest.

Fulfill the gaps in spread, status and habitats of threatened species in the sea

Sustainable use of wetlands with good practices.

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