



Summary Report

NATO-CCMS Short Term Project

**Expert Meeting
on**

**The Role of Biodiversity for Sustainable Development
in the Southern Caucasus Region**

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Azerbaijan – Progress and Perspectives

Baku, 22-24 May 2006

1 Aim and Scope of the Meeting

Due to its high level of species and ecosystem diversity the Southern Caucasus region has been identified as one of the 25 global biodiversity hotspots. In the past decade Southern Caucasian countries have established National Parks and set up new protected areas to conserve biodiversity in the region. Yet, examples from many countries have shown that in a long run parks and protected areas can only achieve their objectives, if the local population is involved and if it benefits from their establishment. Hence, conditions that foster win-win situations should be aimed for.

For biodiversity conservation to serve as a catalyst for sustainable regional development, it is important to plan, develop and manage a protected area by also considering the potential of its surrounding area and its population. The conducted expert meeting brought together scientists, policy makers and practitioners from different countries to discuss approaches, means and requirements to develop and manage protected areas that at the same time support the creation of economic activities for the local population. The specific challenges and opportunities of transboundary protected areas were also discussed.

In this context the meeting focused on two main issues: (1) the planning and management of protected areas with an integration of local communities, different use options, etc., and (2) the economic development in the surroundings of protected areas through sustainable production and service oriented activities in relation to agriculture, manufacturing, processing, tourism, etc. The meeting aimed to establish networks and to identify gaps and opportunities for future joint research and development activities.

2 Participants and Structure of the Meeting

The expert meeting was combined with the five-year anniversary celebrations of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan. It was opened by the Minister, which contributed to larger media coverage, including a number of television interviews with invited international experts and a documentary film produced during the excursion of the meeting. In total about 100 participants attended the first day of the meeting and about 40 participants the second day. These included 16 international experts, originating from (Austria, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Poland and Romania). Participants from Azerbaijan included members of parliament (first day), scientists from universities and the National Academy of Science, experts from different Ministries and NGOs as well as representatives from different international organisations and embassies.

The meeting covered two days. Following the opening by the Minister and the President of the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN)) as well as the NATO representative, the first day focused on:

- Azerbaijan's experience with biodiversity conservation after the foundation of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources five years ago
- protected area management in the context of sustainable development with national and international experience
- biodiversity conservation through sustainable agricultural practices.

The second day tackled more specific issues related to project implementation, but also the broader perspectives of biodiversity conservation including aspects of transboundary management. Besides, a forum was provided to discuss gaps as well as challenges and opportunities for future research and development activities. In total 22 papers were presented. On the third day international experts were given an opportunity to visit a pilot project of sustainable development in the mountain areas of Azerbaijan.

3 History of the Short Term Project

The meeting followed the recommendations of a seminar on biodiversity that was supported by NATO-CCMS and carried out in June 2005 as part of the Azerbaijan NATO-week. An expert meeting was considered as a suitable tool to share experience and discuss issues related to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development and to link these to aspects of transboundary regional development. The expert meeting was organised by the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Department of International Cooperation. Support on programme design and the selection and invitation of international guests was provided by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Division of International Nature Conservation. Meanwhile communication channels between the two institutions

are well developed and render effective work. The continuous work on one topic allows for more in depth analysis and raises awareness. Hence, more collaborative activities are planned for and further NATO support is requested (see below).

4 Outputs, Products and future Activities

The extensive media coverage raised public awareness and demonstrated international interest for biodiversity conservation in Azerbaijan. It also contributed to a better public understanding of NATO's non-military activities. Furthermore, the meeting fostered exchange and facilitated networking between Azeri and international policy makers, scientists and managers in the field of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. The findings of the expert meeting will be published in a NATO "Blue Book". In addition, potential areas for future collaboration were identified. These included in particular aspects related to laws and regulations for the use of biological resources, environmental education as well as marketing in the context of ecotourism and sustainable production.

For follow up activities a NATO pilot study is envisaged, that takes an interdisciplinary approach and combines research and development activities in the field of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development focussing on the gaps that were discussed during the expert meeting. In conjunction with the pilot study two or three doctoral studies will be applied for to add capacity building at doctoral level and to supplement the pilot study's work. For the preparation of a pilot study proposal a small expert meeting to be held in Germany in the second half of 2006 with partners from the Caucasus region is proposed.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

The meeting contributed to exchange and networking and provided a forum to discuss challenges and opportunities for further activities in the field of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Following a seminar carried out in 2005 that aimed to reflect the broader scope of the theme, the expert meeting focused on protected area management and sustainable development in the context of biodiversity conservation. The results of the meeting showed the need for more detailed analysis in selected thematic areas, the development of practical guidelines and further strengthening of human capacity. Therefore a proposal for a NATO supported pilot study will be developed, in connection with applications for doctoral study grants. Apart from Germany these should involve countries that are neighbouring Azerbaijan, especially Georgia and Turkey.

The collaboration between the Azeri Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and BfN, which was initiated by NATO CCMS, again proved to be effective and productive. Meanwhile numerous contacts have been developed that provide a solid basis for the implementation of a comprehensive pilot study.

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