

Involuntary Restrictions – Process Framework

Proposed project: Enhancing the integrity of the East Lesser Caucasus corridor through the establishment of Gnishik Community Managed Sanctuary, Armenia

Applicant: WWF Armenia

A. Project background

The project is aimed at conservation of globally significant biodiversity in the Southern Armenia through establishment of community managed protected area – Gnishik Sanctuary in Vayots Dzor Region of Armenia (CEPF site # 125 Noravank). The planned Sanctuary will create connectivity between several existing PAs, including Jermuk Sanctuaries to the northeast, Khosrov Reserve to the north and southeast, as well as Azerbaijan’s Bichenek Sanctuary and Ordubad National Park. The proposed area has rich flora and fauna, including about 960 species of vascular plants with more than 280 rare and endemic species as well as such threatened mammals as Bezoar goat, Armenian mouflon, Caucasian leopard, Eurasian lynx and birds included in International Red List - Lesser Kestrel, Imperial Eagle and Greater Spotted Eagle.

The planned Sanctuary will be located on the territory of 4 communities. The envisaged sanctuary area is mainly community owned with small proportion of state and privatized areas. In terms of land use the area has high proportion of barren lands and pastures and less arable lands and hay meadows. The lands are used by communities for various purposes such as livestock grazing, crop cultivation and collection of plants for food and medicine. The project will work with communities to establish the sanctuary, making it a model for community participation in protected area management.

The main project activities will be related to participatory planning of the sanctuary, enforcement of protection regime, development of tourism related infrastructure and creation of alternative livelihood for involved communities. The planned activities with potential impact are presented below:

- Organization of planning, consultative and informative meetings with all key stakeholders, including regional government and communities will result in increased awareness of the values of the area, importance of sanctuary creation, discussions on the role and participation of involved parties in its establishment, management planning and implementation, possible restrictions connected with establishment of sanctuary, ways to resolve conflicts and others.
- Participatory development of management plan, zoning plan and individual sustainable use plans for each natural resource used within the sanctuary will be implemented with direct participation of involved communities on the basis of establishment of respective working groups to develop proposals to be widely discussed, agreed and incorporated in the planning documents. In the result, the developed plans will get ownership by communities and high potential for implementation.
- Preparation of draft documentation for official establishment of Gnishik Sanctuary as a community-based protected area and submission to relevant governmental bodies for review and approval will be an important step towards formal establishment of the sanctuary. Upon its establishment it should be possible to approve and start implementation of the plans.

- Capacity building through provision of the office with necessary equipment as well as human resource development via trainings will result in safeguarding necessary technical base and skills/knowledge for further effective management including protection, monitoring, ecotourism activities and others.
- Implementation of alternative livelihoods activities linked to nature conservation outcomes in combination with outreach and awareness raising activities will result in provision of additional sources of income to communities and reduce pressures on natural resources. This will provide employment opportunities to communities and their better engagement in ecotourism and other activities connected with the sanctuary.

Some of the project activities may have potential impact on the resource use by local communities, in particular when it comes to unsustainable hunting and land use practices. Establishment of protected area implies some restrictions on use of the territory. The participatory zoning and management planning with direct involvement of affected communities should result in development of a draft zoning and plans fully agreed with involved communities on the basis of intensive consultations. In addition, capacity building aimed at strengthening of sanctuary protection regime and monitoring should reduce unsustainable use practices. There will be no resettlement.

Establishment of the sanctuary may potentially affect the livelihoods of local communities through reduced access to some natural resources (though participatory planning will minimize this impact). Anyway, the project will seek to mitigate this impact by providing alternative livelihoods opportunities to affected communities. The mitigation activities will be identified in consultation and discussions with the affected communities along with identification of necessary additional funding for their implementation. At present some alternative livelihoods activities were already implemented in the frame of the project “Biodiversity Protection and Community Development: Implementing Ecoregional Conservation Plan Targets in South Armenia” financed by the Norwegian Government and implemented by WWF Armenia together with WWF Norway. In particular, during 2009-2010 Gnishik community was supported by development of bee-keeping and provision of agro technique and rye for seeding.

The community representatives will have a chance to be employed by the sanctuary to get involved in the management of the sanctuary including protection and monitoring. This along with the above mentioned provision of alternative livelihoods opportunities will have direct positive impact on community members.

This project was developed to complement ongoing activities in support to establishment and management of Gnishik Sanctuary, in particular in the frame of the above mentioned Norwegian funded project as well as UNDP/GEF project component “Developing the Protected Area System of Armenia: Improving capacity building and management regime” implemented by WWF Armenia. The proposed project will be a continuation of activities implemented since 2006 to establish Gnishik protected area. In particular, in 2006-2007 CEPF project “Feasibility study of establishment of Gnishik protected area” was implemented by “Biodiversity and Landscape Conservation Union” NGO under overall coordination and management of WWF, which resulted in development of a draft concept of management plan. In 2009 the preparatory phase of the UNDP/GEF project “Developing the Protected Area System of Armenia” was implemented by WWF Armenia with involvement of an international expert, which resulted in development of a full proposal for GEF approval. Both projects included intensive consultations and discussions with local communities to inform about importance of the protected area establishment, its planning and management, the ways to mitigate negative impacts on local communities and others. In addition, in the frame of the Norwegian funded project in 2008 the socio-economic analysis of Vayots Dzor Region (where the planned Gnishik Sanctuary is

located) was implemented in the light of biodiversity protection in wildlife corridors; it resulted in conclusions and recommendations aimed at sustainable life-stock grazing, mitigation of illegal hunting and nature use, infrastructure development and exploitation and others.

This project was designed in close collaboration with involved communities, regional administration, local/regional NGOs and other stakeholders. Based on WWF Armenia's experience from previous project activities in the target area, it was possible to discuss proposed project with involved communities and one more time get their consent regarding importance of the sanctuary establishment, given communities are consulted during zoning and planning as well as involved in its management. The other stakeholders consulted during project development include but not limited to the followings: Vayots Dzor regional administration, respective regional body of the state environmental inspection, Bioresources Management Agency of the Ministry of Nature Protection as the body responsible for management of specially protected nature areas of Armenia and others.

B. Participatory implementation

The area planned for establishment of Gnishik Sanctuary includes mainly community owned lands with small proportion of privatized and state lands. Therefore, the planning activities envisaged by the project will be implemented with direct participation of all involved communities through establishment of working groups to develop proposals on land use regarding separate natural resources. There will be an intensive consultative process to discuss and agree on the land use with consideration of the need for having non-used key areas important from biodiversity point of view. The meetings and discussions with communities will be held also to decide on alternative livelihoods opportunities to be developed for communities to provide additional income and reduce pressures on natural resources.

There are good prerequisites for holding successful consultative process on the planned territory as thanks to the previous activities implemented by WWF Armenia in the frame of different projects the communities are rather familiar with and agree on the idea of having a protected area established on the territory.

The zoning and management plan developed in close collaboration with engaged parties should serve as a road-map for the sanctuary and involved communities to safeguard sustainable land use and protection of key areas. Further involvement of community members in the sanctuary related activities should ensure community participation in the sanctuary management and implementation of the plans developed in a participatory manner.

It is planned that the management of the planned sanctuary will be done by "Gnishik Intercommunity Fund" Community Based Organization, which was established on the basis of Vayots Dzor communities, including 4 target communities located in the project site and planned to be included in the territory of the sanctuary (communities Areni, Khachik, Gnishik and Agarakadzor). At present the Fund implements various activities aimed at community development and nature protection. As soon as the Fund becomes the sanctuary management unit, the communities it represents will be involved in the sanctuary management.

C. Criteria for eligibility of affected persons

There will be very few (probably no) individuals to be eligible for compensation measures as involuntary restrictions will be mainly placed on illegal and unsustainable activities. The

communities should have possibility to continue traditional use of the area, which however does not mean hunting or collection of wild species registered in red lists, thus prohibited for use. The participatory planning of the area with intensive community consultations will result in development of plans and zoning acceptable for all concerned parties. Therefore the decisions regarding use restrictions in certain areas will be made on the basis of common understanding and consent.

The idea of having a community based protected area implies establishment of a model, which would benefit both local communities and conservation targets. All the communities will be consulted during the planning process. In case there is no other option than to restrict not unsustainable, illegal or destructive use, then such individuals should benefit from alternative livelihoods activities envisaged by the project.

D. Measures to assist the affected persons

In the course of project implementation there will be consultations with communities, which should identify persons to be affected (if any) and eligible for compensation. The discussions will be held and agreement reached on mitigation measures. Meanwhile, the alternative livelihoods activities envisaged by this project as well as those implemented in the target communities by WWF Armenia in the frame of the Norwegian project will provide some mitigation in case of restriction. Such measures may include provision of alternatives on bee-keeping, ecotourism development with provision of respective services by communities (B&B and others), support to sustainable farming and other similar activities, which will be identified through consultations and discussions during project implementation.

E. Conflict resolution and complaint mechanism

The project is designed in a way to avoid or minimize possible conflicts and grievances. In particular, planning activities will be implemented in a wide participatory manner with involvement of all concerned parties. In addition, awareness raising activities are envisaged to ensure provision of respective information on the protected area, sustainable land use, restrictions and benefits to communities and others. The community consultations will safeguard that decisions on respective land use or restrictions for using certain areas or resources are made with full consent of engaged communities having comprehensive information on the area, consequences of protected area establishment, their roles and responsibilities and others. During the project implementation WWF Armenia will facilitate meetings and discussion of key issues between communities and respective state bodies such as Bioresources Management Agency (responsible for management of protected areas).

The conflicts raised by affected communities or individuals during the planning process should be resolved through discussion with making the best acceptable decision from both community and biodiversity point of views. WWF Armenia and UNDP Armenia will be responsible for facilitation of conflict resolution during the planning through organization of meetings with project partners (state bodies) and communities to discuss the issues and come to acceptable solutions to be implemented by the project. In particular, WWF Armenia should be the first point of call and will work with project partners to ensure that these grievances are addressed timely and appropriately. The communities will be informed that can make grievances at any time during the planning and provided with respective contact information.

F. Implementation arrangements

WWF Armenia will be responsible for the project management and will coordinate the envisaged project activities to be implemented through hired experts and organizations (sub-grants). WWF Armenia will cooperate closely with all involved communities as well as respective state bodies, including Vayots Dzor regional administration, regional branch of state environmental inspection, Bioresources Management Agency and others. WWF Armenia will be responsible for participatory planning and community consultations as well as conflict resolution and development of mitigation strategies during the planning process (if any negative impact is recorded). Implementation of the plans will be under responsibility of the sanctuary administration, which should work in close collaboration with communities.

Communities should take responsibility to participate in the working groups and provide their proposals and views on different issues connected with the protected area, land and resource use and others.