

Process Framework for Involuntary Restrictions

28.03.2020

CEPF Grant 110130

Grantee Environmental Citizens' Association "Front 21/42"

Project Title

Enhance the Transboundary Conservation of the World Heritage Site Lake Ohrid in
North Macedonia and Albania

Project Location North Macedonia and Albania

Grant Summary

1. **Grantee organization:** Environmental Citizens' Association "Front 21/42"
2. **Grant title:** Enhance the Transboundary Conservation of the World Heritage Site Lake Ohrid in North Macedonia and Albania
3. **Grant number:** 110130
4. **Grant amount (US dollars):** 150.000,00
5. **Proposed dates of grant:** 01.05.2020 – 31.05.2022
6. **Countries or territories where project will be undertaken:** North Macedonia and Albania
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A. Project background

The project is focused on creating the crucial conditions for the much needed conservation measures and building the necessary foundation for long-term protection of the oldest lake in Europe and one of the oldest in the world – Lake Ohrid Lake Ohrid. Our project focus, is also “*by far the most diverse lake in the world taking surface area into account*” (IUCN), and we aim to establish formal rules which will tackle decades old threats that brought this globally unique and ancient freshwater ecosystem to a point to fulfil the criteria to be listed as a World heritage in Danger. Specifically, the project will result with a new Lake Ohrid Law and the first transboundary Macedonian/Albanian CSO partnership for protection of the lake.

In the past twenty years, the condition of the Outstanding Universal Values of the World Natural Heritage Site Ohrid Region is continually declining, to a point of becoming so vulnerable that in 2019 IUCN asked the World Heritage Committee to inscribe Ohrid Region on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Among the greatest threats on both sides of the lake the following were reported by the Reactive Monitoring Mission: “*extensive uncontrolled urban development and inappropriate exploitation of the coastal zones. These result in higher water consumption, increased pollution, habitat fragmentation and destruction (...)*” and “*Over-fishing – Fishing, primarily for endemic trout and eel species, is poorly regulated and monitored. The number of licensed fishers has doubled in the last decade, and harvest is almost certainly unsustainable, despite the successful operation of hatcheries in both countries. (...)*”

As noted by IUCN, major changes in governance, management, planning, conservation and enforcement processes are necessary to stop the destruction. In this manner, one of the measures asked to be implemented as a matter of urgency is establishing a moratorium on all urban and coastal transformations at least until all legal, planning and management documents for the property are in place. For the Macedonian side the most important law to be created and adopted in the period 2020-2022 is the Law for Management of Lake Ohrid, which will serve as a base and framework for the Management Plan for Lake Ohrid.

With this law Lake Ohrid will get a formal protection - Monument of Nature (IUCN category III). We see this as a major opportunity to ensure long-term protection of the lake because the Lake Ohrid Law will practically define the whole protection/conservation obligations, responsibilities and possibilities – it will define the zones with various levels of protection within the lake, the structure of the management body, etc.

The current state of the lake is a direct consequence of decades without a full and proper legal regulation of the management (including fishery, type of boats and zones in which they are allowed, monitoring and fines for introduction of invasive species in the lake, coastal management, etc.).

Legal protection and regulated management of the lake and its coast have to be done in a transboundary manner – as confirmed by the IUCN and the 2019 World Heritage Committee Decisions. Proper and long-term protection is not possible without close partnership between all key stakeholders in North Macedonia and Albania. While there are recent activities for close cooperation between the two Governments and various institutions, CSOs cooperation is non-existent. This is, mainly due to the lack of capacities of the Albanian CSOs to get engaged in the protection of Lake Ohrid, and our project puts a great focus on solving this problem as well.

Main project components include legal actions and advocacy (Component 1 and 2) and transboundary partnership (Component 3); Key deliverables within these components are: CSOs' proposal for Lake Ohrid Law, Lake Ohrid formal designation as a Ramsar Site, Custom made capacity building program for the Albanian CSOs, Joint Lake Ohrid Transboundary Protection Programme created and implemented by Macedonian and Albanian CSOs.

B. Participatory implementation

Our project pays special attention to the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in all phases of the implementation. The key activity – new Lake Ohrid Law, starts with several rounds of consultations (questionnaires and direct meetings) with local communities, the private sector, local governments, biodiversity experts, CSOs and activists' groups. The draft version will also be circulated among all these affected groups and their comments will be taken into account for the final version which will be presented to the authorities. The same principle is followed for the transboundary CSO partnership – it starts with meetings and consultations with stakeholders (Albanian CSOs) and continues with joint implementation of all regional activities. Special focus is put on consultations and meetings for specific issues/documents with local communities in both countries (e.g. tourism development strategy, Management Plan for Lake Ohrid River Basin, etc.). During the consultation activities we will also pay special attention to gender equality and make sure that potential impacts on both women and men are considered.

Meaningful participation of all affected stakeholders in policy creation and decision-making processes is crucial element of our work – we use the law to improve both nature protection and environmental democracy, these are 2 pillars of all our activities. Of course, considering the fact that our project aims to put in place new legislation and other formal framework, local and central governments and institutions are among the key stakeholders. In this manner, during the process of designing the project, several events involving close communication with the authorities took place:

On December 28th 2019 the Government of North Macedonia appointed the Macedonian members of the Transboundary Committee for Management of the River Basin of Lake Ohrid and our representative, Aleksandra Bujaroska, is appointed as a CSO member who was selected by the environmental NGOs. This formal body has a consultancy role for both governments and will provide assistance and recommendations related to the river basin (legislation, strategies, action plans, monitoring, etc.), but also for wider area (the lake itself, surrounding landscape, etc.) and variety of issues (sustainable development of related urban areas, agriculture, tourism, etc.). We consider this to be of prime importance for our project because it provides direct opportunity to harmonize the legislation and management of Lake Ohrid with the formal documents for the river basin and make sure that all legislative and management framework contributes towards the same goals and enables comprehensive protection of the whole ecosystem. The fact that there is no Albanian CSO representative in the Committee further underlines the mutual benefits between our work in the Committee and our project, which envisages transboundary partnership for the protection and conservation of Lake Ohrid. Our work in this formal body will be very beneficial for the envisaged consultations with all stakeholders for the new law, as well as for the advocacy activities for its adoption.

In February 2020, our representative had a meeting about Ohrid Region with the President of the Country, Mr. Stevo Pendarovski. After hearing our experience, concerns and suggestions, the President promised his personal engagement right after the elections in April 2020 and suggested a small working group with representatives from his Cabinet, the Government and Front 21/42 - this is a base for a crucial partnership for our project on the highest level.

Last, but not least, during the preparation of the project application we discussed the project and specific biodiversity issues/needs with our colleagues from Macedonian Ecological Society. We plan to continue this cooperation during the project implementation as well. We also have cooperation and communication with IUCN, advisory body for nature to the World Heritage Centre and had a meeting with their Reactive Mission to the property in January 2020.

Our project limits the access to natural resources, but in a way which is **beneficial for the most effected stakeholders – the local community**. The lack of legal protection and regulated management of the Lake Ohrid and its coast are among the key identified problems that seriously impact and threaten the biodiversity of the lake, as well as the World Heritage status of the site - pristine and clean lake, full of life and a World Heritage Site is at the core of the tourism in the region, which is crucial for the local communities and their well-being.

Besides tourism, fishery is another key activity of the local communities and the representatives of this group publicly voiced their worries about the current situation. In January 2020 the contract for the private concession of the lake has been annulled and the local police remained to be the only protector of the lake. In February 2020 the police caught 4 poachers with a record catchment of 50kg of the endemic trout. This year, for the first time since 1988 there wasn't an induced spawning of the trout. On top of that, despite being one of the required measures by UNESCO since 2017, nothing has been done in relation to the control of invasive species, biodiversity monitoring programme and legal provisions for protection of endangered and endemic species. Ohrid Law (envisaged in this project) is a key document which will impose legally binding conservation measures, rules for fishery,

monitoring and transparent reporting, etc. It will also define clear rules for management of the lake and impose creation of independent, expert management body.

Despite being the only World Natural and Cultural Heritage Site in North Macedonia, as well as a prime tourist spot, the Municipality of Ohrid has the highest emigration rate, especially among young people. The main reason is unemployment. The touristic season in Ohrid is limited to approximately 1-2 months in summer and throughout the rest of the year it is almost empty. And yet, instead of creating a strategy which will ensure sustainable tourism during the whole year and provide income for the local citizens, both central and local Government are focused on plans and projects which favour big companies (hotels) and construction of new apartment buildings (mainly sold to Skopje citizens as holiday apartments), new marina, etc. Lake Ohrid and its surroundings have a potential to become a world class destination for various forms of sustainable and responsible tourism, such as educational, adventure and science tourism; the local culture and cuisine, arts and crafts, famous filigree, etc. add to this reach potential. Setting up proper legal and other forms of formal framework for conservation of the natural values, rules for sustainable tourism development based on and in service of the Outstanding Universal Values of the region, as well as establishing close transboundary cooperation between local citizens and small businesses – can be a crucial stepping stone towards sustainable economic development, new jobs for the locals and consequently reduction of the worrying emigration.

C. Criteria for eligibility of affected persons

No person will be adversely affected by the project. The project will affect illegal activities, such as poaching and illegal construction on the coast, which not only don't contribute to the local communities' livelihood, but rather to their impoverishment, by focusing on commercial gain without any regard to the long-term negative impact on natural resources which are the very basis for local sustainable development. The project aims at establishing legal framework for protection and conservation of the natural resources, and in this manner improved protection of the lake and fishery regulations will make fishing activities for legal fishermen more profitable. Following this year incident with poachers caught by the local police, local fishermen themselves clearly asked for strict regulation and formal protection and management of the lake. The same can be applied to the illegal construction on the lake's coast, such as hotels and restaurants – this was detected by IUCN as one of the major threats for the habitat and the biodiversity and local communities in the coastal villages organized several protests against such constructions. The new Lake Ohrid Law and consequently the Management Plan based on this law, will set up rules for urbanization of the coast, as well as meaningful participation of the local communities in all decision-making processes, thus contributing to the wellbeing of local communities.

D. Measures to assist the affected persons

Within the Component 2 we envisage educational activities for local communities on both sides of the lake, these will raise the awareness of and knowledge about the natural values of the lake, as well as existing forms of economic activities (such as various forms of environmentally responsible tourism) which can bring benefits to the conservation and local economic development at the same time. As previously mentioned, consultations with affected groups are integral part of all key activities related to formal framework (law, strategies, management plans).

E. Conflict resolution and complaint mechanism.

After the initial project phase (which is focused on desk research) we plan to start with a series of meetings with all relevant stakeholders (as part of the several rounds of consultations for the new law). During the first round of meetings we will start with a presentation of the project and distribute all required information in a form of a printed flyer, as well as post it on our website. Local CSOs in North Macedonia and Albania will further distribute the information among wider local community. Educational and promotional activities envisaged in years 2 and 3 will also be used to spread the information and all required contact details (flyers and web site).

This grievance mechanism will be described in details on our website. Reference to the web page will be indicated on the flyers and notified to participants to the meetings. The grievance mechanism will include:

- Email and telephone contact information of (XXXX staff or director name from Front)
- Indication that if claimant is not satisfied by the response provided by Front, they should contact the CEPF Regional Implementation Team (Borut Rubinič borut.rubinic@dopps.si) and the CEPF Grant Director (Pierre Carret, pcarret@cepf.net)`
- And then that if no solution is found, claimant could contact the CEPF Executive Director at the following address: cepfexecutive@conservation.org or by land mail at:

CEPF Executive Director,
Conservation International
2011 Crystal Drive – Suite 600 –
Arlington, VA 22202
USA

We will share all grievances – and a proposed response – with the Regional Implementation Team and the CEPF Grant Director within 15 days. If the claimant is not satisfied following the response, they may submit the grievance directly to the CEPF Executive Director at cepfexecutive@conservation.org or by surface mail. If the claimant is not satisfied with the response from the CEPF Executive Director, they may submit the grievance to the World Bank at the local World Bank office.

F. Implementation Arrangements

Implementation of the project and its safeguard mechanisms will be done by Front 21/42 and our Albanian partner (to be selected as part of the project). We will inform our partner of the obligations under the conflict resolution and complaint mechanism, and discuss with them the practical implementation mechanisms suggested, before actual implementation on the ground. These discussions will be held during the initial regional meeting. Also Monitoring and Evaluation system will be put in place by the regional project team to track key outcomes, complaints and participatory discussions. Report on the stakeholders' consultations will be produced.