

## Involuntary Restrictions – Process Framework

### Enhancing the landscape and ecological integrity of the Greater Caucasus Corridor through establishment of Khevsureti National Park, Georgia

#### A. PROJECT BACKGROUND

##### 1. Project Content

**The given project is focused on Pshav-Khevsureti planning territory** with the approximate area of 117,000 hectares. Importance of creation of Khevsureti protected area is defined by regional- and national-level strategic documents:

- ❑ The Pshav-Khevsureti planning territory is the part of one of priority conservation areas and corridors defined by the Caucasus Ecoregional Conservation Plan (ECP).
- ❑ Creation of Khevsureti protected area is one of goals of the five-year “Strategy and Action Plan of Protected Areas System Development in Georgia” - Strategic Goal 1, Objective 1.3.5.

In 2008, “the Committee on Establishing of Pshav-Khevsureti Protected Area” was established at the Agency of Protected Areas with the Order of Head of Agency to support protected area planning in Pshav-Khevsureti region. The Committee served as a multi-stakeholder platform in preliminary planning and as a result of its work the Committee has produced the main guiding document and recommended the Ministry of Environment Protection to facilitate and intensify establishing of new protected area in Pshav-Khevsureti region.

During the Phase 1, CEPF significantly contributed to the effective functioning and work of “the Committee on Establishing of Pshav-Khevsureti Protected Area”. In the frame of the CEPF/WWF Small Grants Programme, the small grant was awarded for the project – “*Preliminary work and development of documentation for establishing Khevsureti Protected Area*”. The project was implemented in close cooperation with the Agency of Protected Areas, the Committee and local communities. The main management guiding document on creation of protected area in Pshav-Khevsureti region, produced in the frame of this small grant, represents the joint product of these three parties. Through the CEPF-financed small grant basic biodiversity researches were carried out, a management guideline was developed, and preliminary consultations convened with the central and local governments and local communities. However, additional investment is required in order to build on already created baseline, complete the legal creation of the National Park, establish the protected area and its management capacity on the ground, and expand the existing constituency of support among key stakeholders.

**The main aim of the project is** to enhance landscape and ecological integrities in the East part of the Greater Caucasus Corridor through the legal and ground establishment of Khevsureti National Park. However, it should be stressed that this grant will contribute to consolidation of the CEPF overall investment of around half million dollars made during its phase-1 for development of the protected areas system and enhancing the ecological connectivity at the landscape scale across the Greater Caucasus Corridor

([http://www.cepf.net/Documents/Final\\_Caucasus\\_Assessment\\_Jan2010.pdf](http://www.cepf.net/Documents/Final_Caucasus_Assessment_Jan2010.pdf); pages 10-13). Besides, large investments were made in the Greater Caucasus for improving or stabilizing

the conservation status of globally threatened species and ultimately avoid extinctions through the conservation and improved management of key sites. The given proposal will also significantly help in consolidating conservation efforts for globally threatened species occurring in the Greater Caucasus Corridor.

The project target Pshav-Khevsureti planning area is rich in biodiversity with around 1200 species of flora and over 170 species of fauna. This area is a home for many globally and nationally threatened (*vulnerable, endangered, critically endangered*) flora and fauna species listed in the National and Global Red Lists for strengthening their protection regime and regulations. Moreover, flora of this mountainous area is characterized with high rate of various level of endemism - local, national and regional. From spread 1200 plant species 260 ones (almost 22%) represent regional, national or local endemic species. Furthermore, seven endemic genera are found within the planning Pshav-Khevsureti area out of existing 17 endemic genera of the Caucasus Flora.

Establishment of Khevsureti National Park will fill an existing spatial gap between Tusheti and Kazbegi National Parks and will significantly contribute to enhancing the landscape and ecological integrities within the East Greater Caucasus large conservation landscape covering almost half of the Greater Caucasus Corridor. The area is particularly important for conservation of globally threatened species, such as bezoar goat and some bird species, as well as regionally threatened endemic East Caucasian tur (IUCN Red List: currently NT with population trend - ``decreasing``), Caucasian leopard (EN as subspecies), Brown bear and European lynx. Untouched high mountain pine-birch forests, with endemic Caucasian pine and endemic and relict Radde's birch, have been survived to date in the planning Pshav-Khevsureti area: local people have considered and still consider them as sacred groves. A lot of endemic plant species grow in alpine and higher (sub-nival) zones of Khevsureti area which are underrepresented in current protected areas system.

If this proposed project will not be implemented and existing protected areas system gap will not be addressed, poaching, extensive / unsustainable grazing of domestic animals, as well as unsustainable forest resource use will continue and only population of bezoar goat in Georgia survived in Khevsureti-Tusheti area could extinct, which will deadly influence the whole Greater Caucasus population of this species (*outside of Georgia the populations occur only in bordering Daghestan Autonomy Republic of Russian Federation*). Exactly the same can be said about a small population of leopard still existed in the Greater Caucasus. Besides, populations of East Caucasian tur and other larger mammals will be negatively affected leading to their decreasing trend. Also, rich and diverse vital ecological services and benefits deriving from nature will be threatened, with further negative impacts on local livelihoods in this important mountain province.

Establishment of Khevsureti National Park is a wise and efficient way to: (i) achieve biodiversity conservation through protection of currently under-represented ecosystems and species; and (ii) effectively control and eradicate existing threats to biodiversity – poaching, illegal use of forest resources, overgrazing and over-fishing. Also, this protected area will create real perspectives and basis for further development of the community-based tourism, which is an alternative way for improving livelihoods in the oldest and poorest mountainous region of Georgia with very interesting history and numerous of historical and cultural monuments.

**The main objectives of the project are to:** (i) carry out required additional assessments and surveys to complete legal creation/declaration of new Khevsureti National Park; (ii) establish the National Park and its management capacity on the ground; (iii) expand the existing constituency of support among key stakeholders; and (iv) create a baseline to support further integrated management and sustainable development of the target region.

The set objectives will be achieved **through accomplishment the following envisaged components of the project:**

- ❑ **Component 1:** Basic surveys and assessments for creation of Khevsureti National Park carried out. These surveys will fill in existing information gaps required for legal creation and proper management planning of the National Park.
- ❑ **Component 2:** Wide-participatory approach applied for planning of Khevsureti National Park. This component will ensure active participation of all central and local key stakeholders and players throughout the project implementation.
- ❑ **Component 3:** Khevsureti National Park legally declared. Under the given component a draft a law "On Establishment and Management of Khevsureti National Park" will be prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Environment Protection for further coordination and discussion with the relevant governmental stakeholders and proposing to the Georgian Parliament for final approval.
- ❑ **Component 4:** Khevsureti National Park established and operational. This component will help in creation of technical and management capacity of the National Park on the ground.
- ❑ **Component 5:** A Support Zone Programme for Khevsureti National Park developed. This component will create a strong baseline for integrated management and sustainable development of the target region.
- ❑ **Component 6:** A Tourism Development Plan for Khevsureti National Park elaborated. This plan will serve as the main guide for tourism development which is only alternative way for improving livelihoods of local communities in the oldest and poorest mountainous region of Georgia.
- ❑ **Component 7:** Trust building measures defined and implemented for local communities. Small scale trust-building measures will be implemented in a highly participatory way and will have a quick, positive and direct short-term impact on the livelihoods of local communities. Linkages of these measures to nature conservation will be considered as well.

## **2. Consultations with key stakeholders**

During the above-mentioned Phase 1, CEPF significantly contributed to stakeholders' participation in the planning of Khevsureti National Park. In the frame of the CEPF/WWF Small Grants Programme, the small grant was awarded for the project – *"Preliminary work and development of documentation for establishing Khevsureti Protected Area"*. The project was implemented in close cooperation with the Agency of Protected Areas, "the Committee on Establishing of Pshav-Khevsureti Protected Area" and local communities. During the project implementation, in the period of 2008-2009, more than 150 representatives of local communities as well as officials from local authorities were

involved in consultations and meetings, and itself their positive feedback and motivation on creation new protected area was the main pillar for drafting the given proposal. Key stakeholders believe that creation of the protected area is only way to protect their environment / nature and also, to create perspectives for further sustainable development of this region.

### **3. Potential impacts of the project**

Creation of a new protected area, with effective management systems on the ground, has to ensure protection of key species and habitats as well as sustainable use of natural resources. Accordingly, several of the planned components and their relevant activities will have potential implications on the resource use by local communities, predominantly as this relates to unsustainable, illegal and destructive practices. Before final zoning of the National Park, it is difficult to envisage in what degree the project will have restrictions to use of natural resources on the ground. However the livelihoods of local communities may also be affected through reduced access to forest resources which may not be illegal, unsustainable or destructive. If this turns out to be the case, the project will identify these people and/or groups through a process of community consultations and seek to mitigate the negative impacts of the project by providing alternative income generation. The favoured option would be to employ these individuals at the newly established protected area: Khevsureti National Park. At the same time, incentive-based conservation schemes / trust-building measures (e.g. livestock/fish farming/bee keeping, etc.) will be proposed and discussed in detail with affected communities as alternatives to exploitation of natural resources within the national park. The appropriate approach or strategy will be identified in close consultation with the affected community members and groups during the lifetime of this project.

Direct positive impacts of the project will include employment of at least 5 local community members as staff of the newly established Khevsureti National Park. Generally, creation of the National Park, with its side activities, will not have negative effects on local communities but rather this will clarify the legal situation of resource use within the Protected Areas, determine the potential economic impacts of protected area establishment and identify potential mitigation strategies, e.g. such as incentive-based conservation schemes / trust-building measures. Small-scale trust-building measures will be implemented in a participatory way and will have quick, positive and direct short-term impacts on the livelihoods of local communities.

Besides, elaboration of a tourism development plan will be a positive impact of the project. This plan will serve as the main guide for tourism development, which is an alternative way for improving livelihoods of local communities in the oldest and poorest mountainous region of Georgia. In addition, elaboration of a 'Support Zone Development Programme' will be a very significant contribution to the sustainable development of the region with full consideration of locals' needs as well as conservation priorities. In this regard, it should be mentioned that there is a real opportunity of leveraging follow-on funding from the German Development Bank (KfW). This additional funding is being raised within the framework Agreement signed between the Government of Georgia and KfW in February 2011. It should be highlighted that KfW's concept or conservation priority is not only about the nature but it is also to work with the people surrounding protected areas to invest for social-economic development of these communities. According to a preliminary agreement

with KfW, up to US\$1 million will be allocated for Khevsureti National Park in the period of 2013-2015 to build on results of the CEPF investment, help further development of the Park, implement the Support Zone Development Programme and support sustainable development of the region.

## **B. PARTICIPATORY IMPLEMENTATION**

The project area is located in the eastern part of Georgia and administratively belongs to Mtskheta-Mtianeti region. At the district/municipality level, the project target area, encompassing 66 villages of Pshavi and Khevsureti territories, is under the management of Dusheti municipality. Villages of the target area are organized under the communities. Currently there is a very difficult socio-economic situation in Pshav-Khevsureti. Due to very difficult living conditions (i.e. mountainous region, lack of infrastructure and communication facilities, poor economic situation and lack of alternative income, etc.), the population size is decreasing, with a continuing trend of people migrating out of the area in recent years. At the present time, around 250 families with a total population of 1,000 people are based in the Pshav-Khevsureti planning area throughout the year.

The project will continue consultations with a wide range of stakeholders at both central and local levels through different approaches. For this purpose, the project envisages to use the existing 'Committee for Establishment of Pshav-Khevsureti Protected Area' (formally created in 2008 under the Agency of Protected Areas of the Ministry of Environment Protection) as a central-level multi-stakeholder platform for coordination and participatory approach throughout creation of Khevsureti National Park. As for local stakeholder participation and involvement in creation of a new protected area, the project envisages creation of a Local Support Group as the main liaison team with local people, involving officials of local governmental authorities as well as representatives from local non-governmental organizations and local communities. Consultations and meetings will be used as the main tool for locals involvement in the process as well as the Local Support Group will be directly involved in the protected area design, zoning and management planning stages. If needed and required, additional concrete mechanism(s) will be discussed and agreed with the Local Support Group to ensure more effective involvement of locals in the relevant processes concerned.

However, it should be highlighted that consultations with the key stakeholders and final decision-making during the project lifetime will be based on well founded and reliable information and data. For this purposes three key assessments are planned to be carried out at the earliest stage of the project: (i) biological; (ii) socio-economic; and (iii) land-use. These will significantly contribute to informed consultations leading to proper decision-making process.

## **C. CRITERIA FOR ELIGIBILITY OF AFFECTED PERSONS**

It should be noted that before completion of the planned three key assessments (i.e. biological, socio-economic, and land-use) and final zoning of the National Park, it is difficult to envisage to what degree the project will place restrictions on use of natural resources on the ground. Nonetheless, the livelihoods of local communities may be affected through reduced access to forest resources which may not be illegal, unsustainable or destructive. If this will be the case, following results of the planned assessments and National Park zoning

and through a process of community consultations, the project will identify local vulnerable groups and/or peoples to be affected by the project and will seek to mitigate impacts of the project by providing alternative income generation. The project will define eligibility criteria for assistance and mitigation measures in close consultations with the key stakeholders, including local communities, and agree these with the CEPF Secretariat. Groups and/or individuals whose livelihoods will be affected by project activities (and where these livelihoods are not unsustainable, illegal and destructive) will be eligible for assistance through trust-building measures planned and budgeted for in the project.

#### **D. MEASURES TO ASSIST THE AFFECTED PERSONS**

As it was already mentioned under Section C above, the project through a process of community consultations will identify local vulnerable groups and/or people affected by the project and will seek to mitigate impacts of the project by providing alternative income generation. The project will propose to vulnerable groups and/or individuals a list of provisional mitigation/trust-building measures for further discussion, coordination and final agreement. The provisional list of the measures has been already developed based on preliminary consultations with the local communities and includes: (a) development of beekeeping; (b) development and promotion of historically well-known and exceptional cultural handcrafts made by locally available natural materials through traditional methods and knowledge; (c) support for artificial propagation of locally available medicinal plants; (d) production and promotion/marketing of local dairy products to be produced through traditional knowledge owned by mountainous people; and (e) production and promotion of local mineral water.

It should be highlighted that before any funds are spent on the planned trust-building measures, WWF CauPO will prepare and submit a plan of trust-building measures to the CEPF Secretariat for prior approval. The plan will include: (i) planned activities; (ii) fund distribution (i.e. what each portion of the funds will be used for); (iii) a justification of the linkages to conservation; (iv) a detailed budget break-down for each trust-building measure; and (v) a monitoring approach for ongoing trust-building measures.

#### **E. CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND COMPLAINT MECHANISM**

Considering the extensive consultations that have already taken place with local communities and other stakeholders, there is a very low risk of any conflict or grievances. As mentioned above, during the CEPF-funded project "Preliminary work and development of documentation for establishing Khevsureti Protected Area", consultations and meetings were convened with local Authorities and local communities on establishing the National Park. During the period 2008-2009, more than 150 representatives of local communities as well as officials from local authorities were involved in consultations and meetings, and itself their positive feedback and motivation on creation new protected area was the main pillar for drafting the new given proposal. The locals believe that creation of the protected area is only way to protect their environment and nature and also, to create perspectives for further sustainable development of this region.

Besides, the project includes an awareness-raising component for local communities to ensure that all locals are aware of the project approach and importance and value of new protected area as the most natural guarantee to maintain existing ecosystem services.

At the same time, the project has a strong participatory approach, which envisages participation of local stakeholders in creation of a new protected area through a Local Support Group involving officials of local governmental authorities as well as representatives from local non-governmental organizations and local communities. Consultations and meetings will be used as the main tool for locals involvement in the process as well as the Local Support Group will be directly involved in the protected area design, zoning and management planning stages. If needed and required, additional concrete mechanism(s) will be discussed and agreed with the Local Support Group to ensure more effective involvement of locals in the relevant processes concerned.

The project has a trust-building component giving opportunity to implement mitigating measures for local individuals and / or groups to be affected by the project.

However, WWF takes responsibility to address any unexpected conflict and/or grievances from the side of local communities while the project implementation and to find optimal solution to be acceptable for all parties involved in the process. WWF will prepare introductory materials, explaining the project objectives, and providing contact information of the WWF CauPO staff and CEPF Secretariat. These materials will be distributed among all communities where the project is being implemented. Any local people with questions, concerns or grievances about the project will be able to communicate them to WWF or CEPF.

#### **F. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS**

WWF is responsible for overall implementation of the project. The project will be carried out in close cooperation with (i) Agency of Protected Areas under the Ministry of Environment Protection; (ii) Committee on Establishing of Pshav-Khevsureti Protected Area; (iii) Ministry of Environment Protection; (iv) Local Government; and (v) Local communities. Roles and responsibilities of all partner organizations are presented in more details in the project log-frame.