

NATIONAL FOREST CONCEPT FOR GEORGIA



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PREFACE

The National Forest Concept for Georgia (hereinafter - the Concept) defines the State's approach to forests, taking into account the main functional purpose of forests and their values.

The Concept shall apply to all forests of Georgia irrespective of the forms of ownership, possession and management. This document will serve as a basis for the development and improvement of the forestry sector related legislation, institutional set-up and other policy documents.

Forests are especially valuable natural resources in Georgia. They occupy about 40% of the territory of the country and have an exceptional importance at the national, regional and global levels. Georgian forests not only conserve the unique biological diversity of Georgia, but ensure continuous delivery of vital direct and indirect benefits and resources to the population. This in turn facilitates the functioning of the field of economy, the growth of human welfare, poverty elimination and creates a favourable environment for the sustainable development of the country.

95-98% of Georgian forests have natural origins. Their composition, structure, growth, development and other characteristics determine a rich biological diversity – up to 400 tree and shrub species grow in Georgian forests. The large number of endemic timber tree species points to the high diversity of dendroflora. Among endemic species 61 species are endemic to Georgia and 43 are endemic to the Caucasus.

Georgian forests provide shelter and migration routes to many animal species, assisting them in maintaining genetic diversity. Georgia lies in one of the Earth's biologically richest regions; one of the WWF's 35 "priority places" covers the Caucasus region. Moreover, Georgia is located within two "biodiversity hotspots" – the Caucasus and Iran-Anatolia - from the 34 "biodiversity hotspots" identified by Conservation International as being distinguished by biodiversity and at the same time gravely threatened territories. Forest massifs surviving in the Georgian mountains are the last untouched forests in the moderate climate zone of the Earth and thus have a global importance.

Georgian forests are required to meet different demands of the national economy and the population. Forest resources are crucial for carrying out social-environmental functions e.g. water regulation, soil protection, climate regulation, recreational, resort, sanitary-hygienic, aesthetic and other useful functions of great significance to the State.

Georgia's forests provide timber for industrial and household use, as well as non-timber resources including medicinal plants.

Forestry activities and processing of forest resources can generate significant value and work possibilities, and thus increase incomes and prosperity of the rural population.

Georgian forests have vital importance for the safety and well-being of the population, as well as for different industries. Clean water supply for the major part of the Georgian population depends on forests. Water supply for agriculture, hydro energy, etc. depends on forest ecosystem health. Forests regulate water quality and mitigate the risk of flooding and flash flooding by regulating the run-off of precipitation. They also help to prevent soil erosion, and mitigate the risk and impacts of landslides, avalanches and mudflows. Forests play an important part in the global carbon cycle by absorbing

carbon from the atmosphere and storing it in woody matter and forest soils. The mentioned regulatory functions are very important for the development of hydro energy (since healthy forests decrease the quantity of river sediments and thus protect water reservoirs from filling) and agriculture (erosion control, pest control, pollination of agricultural crops, etc.).

Georgian forests also have an exceptional aesthetic and recreational importance. Forests add to tourism potential and help to increase the incomes from tourism activities. The existence and development of a number of resorts and types of tourism depend on forest ecosystems. Moreover, Georgian forests have great scientific, historical, spiritual and cultural importance.





THE GOAL OF
THE CONCEPT

For the purpose of solving existing problems in the forestry sector, facilitating poverty elimination, human welfare and promoting sustainable development of the country, the goal of the Concept should be to establish a system of sustainable forest management that will ensure: improvement of the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of Georgian forests, protection of biological diversity, effective use of the economic potential of forests taking into account their ecological value, public participation in forest management related issues, and fair distribution of derived benefits. To achieve this goal the Georgian forests should be used in a way, and at a rate, that ensures maintenance of ecological health and use of their socio-economic potential.





PROBLEMS

The problems existing in the forestry sector that directly reflect on the state of forests are caused by a number of factors, among which the most important include: unsustainable forest management practices over recent years, social background, lack of a political will, etc.

Strategic actions in the forestry and other sectors of industry shall be implemented in a way that considers the main problems listed below and potential threats to forests.

3.1 Imperfect legislation, weak forest management institutions and poor enforcement of law

Primary and secondary forest legislation does not correspond to the principles of sustainable management of forests. Due to flaws and conflicts that exist in regulatory documents these documents contradict each other and other national forestry related legislation.

The level of implementation of international commitments and recommendations related to sustainable management of forestry is not satisfactory.

Forest management bodies cannot ensure effective management of forests due to limited human and financial resources.

Forests have not been transferred to local self-governance units due to weak municipal governance.

The abovementioned legislative shortcomings, absence of an adequate mechanism, improper administration and recruitment policy are the main reasons for poor enforcement. Accordingly, the requirements and obligations established by the legislation have not been adequately enforced.

3.2 Insufficient consideration given to forest values in planning and decision making process

The values of forests by their functional purpose were not considered sufficiently. During the elaboration of development programs and decision making, the lack, or weakness, of instruments that serve to fully assess the functions of forests is related to the low level of awareness in society. The practice of implementing strategic environmental assessments does not exist. Over the recent decades, forest inventories have not been carried out in the majority of the State Forest Fund. Consequently, the State has almost no information about the actual state of the State Forest Fund – about 40% of the country's territory.

The problem is that the boundaries of the State Forest Fund have been changed without deliberation in recent years, and now need to be studied in detail and clarified.

A considerable portion of forests with a high conservation value have not been assigned the status of protected area. The existing area of protected territories in Georgia is not sufficient to ensure

conservation of biodiversity. The existing protected areas do not form a consolidated network to ensure their sustainable use.

Forests are not categorized by their functional purposes. Therefore, the existing system is not consistent with the modern principles of sustainable forest management and ecosystem approach.

A clear example of the inadequate assessment of forest values is the existing improper practice of forest use – timber harvesting is prioritized while other types of forest use are neglected.

The mechanisms of public participation in forestry related decision-making need to be improved to remove barriers to involvement of the public in this process.

3.3 Poverty level

The high levels of poverty in rural areas, lack of affordable alternatives to firewood and lack of alternative pastures are forcing people to use forest resources illegally and unsustainably. The low income population is often involved as a labour force in different illegal businesses related to forest use. Leasing productive forest massifs to the private sector for long-term use has increased the pressure on other forest areas used for meeting social needs. At the same time, improper forest management especially affects the poor, since it prejudices their vital interests related to natural resources and the results of forest degradation – reduced resources and frequent natural disasters – further deteriorate their lives.

3.4 Lack of awareness

Forest users and government officials responsible for management of forestry and other sectors that interact with forests are not sufficiently aware of the importance of forests and of the impacts of their actions and decisions on forests. Therefore they do not take into account the consequences of their decisions, which may cause degradation of forest ecosystems and eventually lead to human induced natural disasters.

3.5 Inadequate financing

The lack of financing for the forest sector is the main factor hindering the development of this sector.

Under conditions of sufficient financing, and after carrying out required reforms, the State will be able to properly implement its main commitments and derive additional environmental, social and economic benefits, including:

- a) Growth in forestry incomes and the share of the forestry sector in the country's economy;
- b) Growth in employment, mainly among local populations.



MAIN PRINCIPLES OF
THE CONCEPT

The principles of the Concept are in accordance with relevant statements and commitments in international agreements relevant to forestry and recognized by Georgia. The guiding principles include, but are not limited to, the following:

4.1 Principle of Sustainable Management of Forests

The overarching guiding principle of the Concept is sustainable management of forests. According to the definition adopted by the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (Forest Europe) sustainable forest management means “the stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfil now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions at local, national, and global levels, and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems”. This principle should apply to everybody involved in forest management: state entities, private entities, communities and others.

4.2 Precautionary principle - to maintain protective functions of forests and their ecological balance

Management of forests has to consider the role of forests and associated ecosystems at the local, regional, national and global levels, applying a precautionary principle whenever management decisions may disturb the ecological balance. All sector strategies and plans must take into account the functional purposes of forests and the need to be implemented in a way that any benefits derived from the forest do not cause degradation of other functions and services provided by the forest.

4.3 “All forests are local”

Priority shall be given to meeting the needs of the local population; however, all stakeholders, including nonlocal population, shall be involved in decision-making processes. At the same time, the local population (in particular, women) shall be considered as a separate stakeholder. All stakeholders shall be empowered to participate in the process effectively.

Everybody's principally free access to forests for non-commercial purposes shall be ensured, regardless of the form of forest ownership (state, communal, private). The identity and culture of local communities residing in the forested areas, and traditional knowledge regarding forest use and conservation, shall be acknowledged, appreciated, and supported. All benefits derived from the use of natural resources shall be distributed fairly between local, regional and national users.

4.4 Separation of policy, management and supervision functions

In order to allow objective monitoring of forestry on one side, and ensure management of forest ecosystems according to best practise on the other, it is necessary to allocate the State's forest management functions to relevant authorised institutions.

The authorised management institutions will be supervised like every other forest manager (communal, private, etc.), by an institution responsible for state control.

4.5 Forestry as an integral part of the sustainable development of the country

The forestry sector is one the most profitable sectors in Georgia, and also facilitates the development of associated sectors (agriculture, energy, tourism, service, etc.).

The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia will coordinate all efforts to harmonise the forest Concept with the strategies of other sectors (agriculture, energy, etc.). The role of the ministry is to manage the process of using Georgia's Forest Fund territories for other purposes (including mining, road construction or other infrastructure development, etc.). If the use of Forest Fund territories for non-forest purposes is required for the State and public needs, appropriate mitigation and compensation measures shall be taken.



PRIORITY DIRECTIONS
OF THE CONCEPT

5.1 Forest management planning

Forests shall be managed in such a way that ensures maintenance of their useful functions and maximum benefits for society, derived from these functions.

Before independence, Georgia applied the former Soviet system of long term forest management plans and silvicultural practice standards. Apart from a few exceptions, forest management planning has not been carried out for many years.

Management planning procedures need to be updated and strengthened, including improvement of mechanisms for involving local communities and other stakeholders in the preparation of forest management plans.

5.1.1 Restoration of degraded forests and afforestation

A large area of the Forest Fund is severely degraded as a result of inadequate forest practices over a long period of time. Degraded forest landscapes are more prone to landslides and avalanches.

The Georgian government realizes the seriousness of the problem and the need to take immediate measures in order to maintain an ecological balance and ensure the growth of areas of forested lands in Georgia.

In the first instance the area of degraded forests shall be specified, the areas subject to restoration and afforestation shall be identified and relevant actions will then be planned/implemented.

5.1.2 Forest use

At present, the potential of forests is not used fully and efficiently from the economic and environmental perspectives.

Planning/implementation of multipurpose and efficient forest use (timber and non-timber forest resources, tourism and recreation, hunting and fishing, use of forest lands for agricultural purposes, etc.) will create a precondition for sustainable forest use. The development of forest infrastructure (e.g. network of forest roads) and improvement of methods and machinery of timber harvesting and processing will considerably decrease the negative impact on the environment and substantially increase benefits derived from forests.

5.1.3 Actions

Ensure that forest management is based on up-to-date management plans that reflect current principles of sustainable forest management, including:

- a) Regulating the forest management planning system through primary and secondary legislation that is obligatory for all bodies responsible for forest management.

- b) Ensuring, by appropriate State supervision, that management of the Forest Fund of Georgia is carried out in conformity with appropriate standards, in particular the “Operational Level Guidelines for Sustainable Forest Management”, adopted by Forest Europe.
- c) Promote voluntary and independent certification of forests to complement government regulation and inspection of forest management and use, including:
- c.a) Completing the process of developing a national forest certification standard and getting international organisations like the Forest Stewardship Council and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification Schemes to recognise the standard;
 - c.b) Making independent certification an objective of state entities that carry out forest management;
 - c.c) Taking steps to get private companies involved in forest management interested in the introduction of voluntary certification.
- d) Elaborate and implement a plan for restoring degraded forest landscapes to full ecosystem health, including:
- d.a) carrying out assessments of the condition of degraded forests and the feasibility of restoring them;
 - d.b) elaborating a forest restoration strategy, including targets, cost estimates, and a business plan for implementing the strategy.
- e) Increasing the contribution of timber harvesting and processing to the national economy, taking into account environmental loads and social demands, including: carrying out a review of the efficiency, profitability and potential of processing raw materials by wood harvesting and processing private enterprises;
- f) Preparing an action programme to increase the added value from wood processing to the national economy;
- g) Carry out a target-oriented programme for plantations of species with fast cutting rotation;
- h) Increasing contribution to the national economy from the exploitation of nontimber forest products and use of forests by their functional purposes, taking into account environmental loads and social demands, including: carrying out a study of the potential for the establishment of small, non-timber forest product processing enterprises and developing and implementing an action plan based on the findings of the study;
- i) Carrying out a study of the tourist and recreational potential of forests and developing and implementing an action plan based on the findings of the study;

- i) Carrying out a study of the tourist and recreational potential of forests and developing and implementing an action plan based on the findings of the study;
- j) Carrying out a study of the potential for using the carbon cycle regulation service of forests as a source of income, for example in the framework of voluntary carbon credits and the REDD+ program.

5.2 Rational use of forest resources

Rational use of forest resources requires an assessment of their role and the relevant economic, social and Environmental significance, including their potential to contribute to sustainable development.

Regular inventories of Georgian forests have not been carried out over the recent decades. Therefore, information about the actual state of Georgia's forests is out of date. The mismatch between the existing data and the actual state of forests creates a serious barrier in planning rational and multipurpose use of forest resources.

Continuous monitoring of forest resources is required to ensure rational use of forest resources and assess results of forest use and changes in the environment.

5.2.1 Actions

In order to implement a rational system of forest use, functional purposes and their values need to be determined. This can be achieved by carrying out the following actions:

- a) Forest inventory – the inventory needs to be carried out by methods that enable researchers to determine the boundaries of the state Forest Fund, its conditions and the main values of the forest stands (expressed qualitatively).
- b) Categorise forests according to their different values and functions, including:
 - b.a) Identifying High Conservation Value Forests by applying the methodology advocated by the High Conservation Value Resource Network;
 - b.b) Dividing the Forest Fund into different functional categories. During this process, contribute to the completion of a representative network of protected areas by increasing the area of forest in IUCN categories I-IV, in accordance with the blueprint in the Caucasus Ecoregion Conservation Plan.
- c) Design and implement a system to enable policy holders and other stakeholders to continually monitor the state of, and trends in, forests and the forestry sector. Ensure that the system complements other monitoring systems (e.g. the national biodiversity monitoring system).

5.3 Forest ownership, management and use rights

The Forest Fund of Georgia is presently state property. The authorised governing bodies of the state Forest Fund are: the Legal Entity of Public Law National Forestry Agency and the LEPL Agency of

Protected Areas of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia. The State Forest Fund in the territory of the Abkhazia and Adjara Autonomous Republics is under the management of the relevant bodies of the Abkhazian and Adjara Autonomous Republics.

Green plantations within the administrative boundaries of the city of Tbilisi (former territory of the State Forest Fund) are under management of the Tbilisi City Hall.

The present Forest Code of Georgia contains the category of “local forests” which have to be managed by a relevant division of local self government within the competences established by the Georgian legislation, and in accordance with the requirements set by the Forest Code. However, such practice does not exist. For its implementation relevant legislation and resources are needed.

Certain areas of the Forest Fund are managed by private entities under long term leases.

A small portion of the Forest Fund has been assigned to the Patriarchate.

The present system of forest management is failing to protect Georgia’s forests from unsustainable and illegal use and to guarantee the maintenance of their ecological balance. Forests close to villages are under particular pressure; however, rural communities have neither the authority nor the relevant responsibility to take care of them yet.

Forest areas leased to the private sector for long-term use are subject to insufficient control by the State, due to insufficient legal mechanisms. While leaseholders lack the motivation to protect and carry out sustainable management of forests.

Changing the ownership structure by distributing or changing responsibilities for managing forests could strengthen forest protection and make management more sustainable, by involving the community and other stakeholders in forest management. However, any change in ownership and the organisation of management responsibilities needs to be considered carefully.

The experiences of other countries that have opted for transitional periods – for example restitution or privatisation – have been more negative than positive. Some states try to regain ownership of the forests leased to the private sector.

Conditions shall be created that will avoid the negative impacts of change, in particular a strong legal framework and a strong administration system to regulate forest use and detect and suppress illegal forest use are needed.

5.3.1 Actions

Identifying the best forms of forest ownership and forest management based on specific case by case assessment (e.g. community ownership, management of state forests by a state body or an entity designated by this body, etc.).

5.4 Adaption to the impacts of climate change

Global warming has already started to affect Georgia's climate. Changes in the climate will have a significant negative impact on Georgia's forests. Doing nothing or delaying the response can put large areas of forest at risk of catastrophic degradation. This will lead to a large reduction in the quantity and quality of the forest resources and useful functions, on which many people in the country depend.

5.4.1 Actions

Elaborate and implement activities aimed at mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change on forests, including:

- a) Commissioning a national report on the state of forests, forest resources, benefits derived from Georgian forests, and on the possible strategies for mitigating the negative impacts and adaptation of Georgian forests to climate change. The report should use the best available information from national and international sources;
- b) Conducting national dialogues on possible strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change on Georgian forests;
- c) Categorizing forest stands according to forest composition and vulnerability to climate change;
- d) Elaborating and adopting sustainable management guidelines and measures, including guidance on the mitigation of negative impacts and adaptation of Georgian forests to climate change, for each forest type;
- e) Preparing and implementing mitigation and adaptation plans for forest stands that are vulnerable to climate change;
- f) Expansion of protected areas;
- g) Reforestation – forest planting, greening urban areas, forest plantations;
- h) Providing forest management bodies and forest users with information on the best methods for carrying out vulnerability assessments and the characteristics of the environment where tree species are spread and originate. Implementing research programmes, specifically on the impacts of expected climate change on forests and the forest functions, and on ways to mitigate the negative impacts and adapt Georgian forests to climate change.



LEGISLATION AND
INSTITUTIONAL
GOVERNANCE

6.1 Legal framework

The Forest Code – the main law governing the forestry sector and secondary legal acts needs to be developed to comply with both the international standards and primary and secondary national legislation.

6.1.1 Actions

Create a legal framework that provides the necessary basis for ensuring the protection and sustainable use of forests. This can be achieved by carrying out following actions:

- a) Preparing a new Forest Code that will provide new or revised systems and mechanisms that will be implemented on the basis of the Concept;
- b) Preparing secondary legislation, including instructions defining forest management standards, and regulations governing relations between the forest owner and bodies responsible for managing forests (communities, private sector, the State, etc.);
- c) Harmonizing other basic legal acts with the new Forest Code.

6.2 Forestry sector administration

Sustainable management of forests requires the establishment of organisations that will ensure proper administration and long-term development of the forestry sector. The Concept needs to be integrated with the development of connected sectors such as agriculture, energy, industry, tourism, etc. In the process of developing management instruments the forestry sector needs to be considered as an intersectoral field.

6.2.1 Actions

The following actions shall be implemented to administer the forestry sector:

- a) Strengthen the capacity of forest management bodies;
- b) Develop an appropriate concept, legislation, standards and other instruments;
- c) Regulate forest use;
- d) Detect and suppress illegal forest use, including by reviewing the functions and capacities of forest management administrators;
- e) Prepare and implement plans aimed at increasing the capacities of the authorized bodies to carry out their functions effectively;
- f) Broaden and strengthen participation in the development of the concept and policy instruments, including by developing mechanisms to involve forestry sector stakeholders in the development of the Concept and policy instruments.

6.3 Forest management institutions

New forest management bodies will have forestry management powers including: creating infrastructure, managing hunting farms, harvesting timber and other forest products, selling forest resources, providing touristic and other services, reinvesting profits, and establishing and developing human and financial resources.

The forest management bodies will require substantial investment in people, equipment, and buildings and other infrastructure. The personnel retrained in educational centres will have a key role in ensuring that forests are protected and used sustainably, and be responsible for all protection and physical management functions including:

- a) Carrying out forest inventories and preparing forest management plans necessary for the preparation of a long term plan of sustainable management and development;
- b) Preparing action plans for the use of forest resources, construction of roads and other infrastructure, forest maintenance, afforestation, hunting, and other relevant activities;
- c) Protecting the territory of the Georgian Forest Fund against illegal actions;
- d) Preventing and combating fires and outbreaks of harmful pests and diseases;
- e) Harvesting forest resources or selling rights to other users to harvest forest resources according to the conditions of the approved management plan.

The present system of financing forest management fails to mobilize sufficient funds to guarantee that forests are properly protected, regenerated and tended. The Georgian Government shall ensure adequate funding of those State bodies that are responsible for forest management and supervision of forest managers, to enable them to carry out their functions effectively.

6.3.1 Actions

Ensure that the respective management bodies have the human resources and technical means to be able to carry out their functions effectively, including:

- a) Prepare and implement a plan for the development of the forest management bodies, including a budget, required technical assistance and an indicative financing and/or business plan;
- b) Develop a scheme for staffing and capacity raising in all institutions according to the requirements of their tasks. Securing sustainable funding from budget and non-budget sources (sales of products and services, compensations, etc.).



EDUCATION AND
SCIENCE

Demand for forestry skills fell massively in the period after regaining independence; many qualified people left the sector. Measures for a reversal of that trend have been taken, with new programmes being developed and teaching staff being brought into higher education institutions from Georgian and foreign academic, research and advocacy organizations. However, it will take time before a sufficient number of qualified people are available to fill all the positions that need to be created. Students and trainees need a clear perspective, which links the tasks they undertake to the skills they need to acquire.

For the development of up-to-date and highly qualified national expertise in forestry and forest management, close cooperation among educational institutions (schools, colleges, and universities) and governmental institutions in charge of forest management is necessary.

Given the national-level importance of forest management and conservation, schools and colleges need to be involved in providing forestry related basic education and underlining the importance of forest resources to the youth. Public schools, especially in rural areas, should include basic knowledge on Georgian forests, their importance and the principles of sustainable use in their courses. University courses in natural sciences should have a sufficient amount of hours for students to spend in the field. This will increase public interest in forests and forestry and encourage more talented students to gain special education in the fields of forestry and forest management.

Special education in forestry should comprise of professional education and short-term training provided by universities and/or state organizations responsible for forest management.

Establishment of special forest training centers and courses, and practical forest trainings in the field should be a priority in these actions. Improving existing forest staff members' qualifications and building new capacities is a key objective and condition for sustainable forest management.

The system of cooperation between the governmental and educational institutions will provide permanent renewal of professional expertise and the development of basic and applied research in forest science and associated fields. Running cutting-edge research projects in forest science, with the aim of publishing the results in international journals, will ensure that the research findings are successfully implemented in forestry practices. It is important that professors and lecturers permanently update their knowledge in line with the most up to date requirements, and that students are involved in the research projects.

7.1 Actions

Strengthen the system of professional forestry education by building an integrated educational system that involves schools, colleges, professional colleges, universities, and governmental institutions by:

- a) Preparing and implementing an education plan for the forestry sector aimed at providing Georgia with the professionally qualified staff it needs;
- b) Teaching basic knowledge of forests in public schools;

- c) Training future academicians, applied scientists, forest managers, and professional teachers at MSc/MBA and PhD levels;
- d) Supporting the employment of young professionals in forestry and regional universities for the improvement of professional education;
- e) Establishing a forest training centre and a model forest management unit to provide field based training for foresters and other actors in the sector;
- f) Close cooperation between State forest institutions and educational institutions for improving existent expertise in forestry;
- g) Using international academic practices to strengthen insufficiently developed branches of forest science in Georgia and support the focused education of Georgian students at foreign universities;
- h) Developing a system for a steady rise in qualification and certification of all employees in the forestry sector (establishment and development of special professional colleges). Assessing the need for establishment of this system.

Support modern level research projects in the field of forest science by:

- a) Supporting university-based researches in forestry science involving students as researchers;
- b) Ensuring close cooperation between research and university education in the field of forestry;
- c) Supporting implementation of modern research outcomes in forest practices;
- d) Re-establishing and developing the Scientific Research Institute of Forestry to meet the present challenges;
- e) Involving the scientific and expert potential of the Academy of Agricultural Sciences in the training and retraining of forestry professionals.



AWARENESS AND
INVOLVEMENT
OF THE SOCIETY

Outside a relatively small group of experts and decision makers the level of awareness regarding the importance of forests and of the principles of sustainable management is low. In general, the public is aware of the importance of forests being a source of direct and indirect benefit to everyone. Despite this, society, including local communities and local authorities on the one hand and forest managers and State decision-making bodies on the other, often shows a lack of responsibility. This is largely due to the lack of knowledge of the principles of sustainable management.

At present there are no effective mechanisms for the involvement of the public in forest related decision-making. The mechanisms that are in place are either inaccurate or are not being enforced.

Pressures from rural households, mainly for fuel wood and access to grazing, are having serious negative impacts on forests. Some of the solutions lie outside the competencies of forest management bodies, in particular raising the income level of rural households, providing alternative livelihood strategies to grazing that do not have negative impacts on forests, and providing affordable alternatives to fuel wood as a source of energy.

It is essential to involve rural communities in the management of their local forests from the management planning stage, with special consideration for the needs of different strata of society, especially youth and women. They shall be made responsible for the rational management and use of resources, which will ensure the well-being of present and future generations.

8.1 Actions

Raise awareness among the population and decision-makers about the importance of forests and sustainable forest management principles, including:

- a) Designing and implementing a strategy and action plan for communicating key messages to the general public and selected target groups;
- b) Improving the mechanisms for public involvement in forest related decision-making, taking into account the norms established by multilateral international agreements and the best international practice.

Broaden the range of livelihood opportunities for rural households, including:

- a) Integrating programmes aimed at reducing rural poverty and creating new job opportunities that consider the interests of different groups of the population, including women and youth, into relevant national strategies;

საქართველოს ეროვნული სატყეო კონცეფცია მომზადდა გარემოსა და ბუნებრივი რესურსების დაცვის სამინისტროს და ეროვნული სატყეო სააგენტოს მიერ „ტყის მდგრადი მართვა საქართველოში“ პროექტის მხარდაჭერით.

პროექტის განმახორციელებელი – კავკასიის გარემოსდაცვითი არასამთავრობო ორგანიზაციების ქსელი (CENN).

დაფინანსებულია ავსტრიის თანამშრომლობა განვითარებისთვის (ADC) მიერ.

The National Forest Concept of Georgia has been prepared by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection and National Forestry Agency of Georgia in the framework of project Sustainable Forest Management in Georgia implemented by the Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN) with financial support from Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC).

2014

დაბეჭდილია გადამუშავებულ ქაღალდზე
Printed on Recycled Paper