



The IUCN Caucasus Cooperation Centre

Concept Paper for establishing a new IUCN presence in the Caucasus



A vision for more effective nature conservation in the Caucasus:

Resilient societies and ecosystems within the Caucasus ecoregion, linking healthy ecosystems with the sustainable management and use of natural resources

IUCN's mission in the Caucasus ecoregion:

To influence, encourage and assist all actors engaged and interested in conserving the region's biodiversity to help enhance the sustainability of results and to improve the overall effectiveness of conservation efforts.

What is IUCN? The global nature conservation network

For 62 years, IUCN has led the development of conservation science and knowledge, and brought together governments, NGOs, scientists, companies and community organizations to help the world make better conservation and development decisions. Its unique role, both on a global level and at the regional level, including in the Caucasus ecoregion, allows IUCN to facilitate coordination among the different actors within the nature conservation field. IUCN can provide guidance and support the efforts of other actors for more effective conservation, by promoting a network approach to conservation action.

IUCN's presence in the Caucasus region is part of the global IUCN network, providing access to the network's knowledge and expertise. The sub-regional structure is tightly linked into the global structure, ensuring two-way communication, bringing local voices to the international level and strong support for local activities.

IUCN's value proposition¹

Providing credible and trusted knowledge: IUCN is well known for its sound scientific base and know-how in conservation and sustainable natural resource management. In particular it has a track record on providing up-to-date knowledge and know-how on species conservation, protected area management and ecosystem management related to water, forests and oceans.

Convening and building partnerships for action: IUCN helps in building bridges between different actors and promoting joint actions and solutions. It uses its unique structure and credibility for establishing multi-stakeholder platforms that bring divergent views together.

Having global to local and local to global reach: IUCN's extensive network of members, Commission members, partners and Secretariat provides it with unequalled opportunity to bridge local and global decision making and action. IUCN's policy positions are underpinned with relevant lessons from the field.

Influencing standards and practices: The IUCN approach to influencing standards and practices helps to ensure that decisions are based on best available science and know-how, and have received the input from a wide set of stakeholders. The Union further assists stakeholders to scale up and adapt practices to local conditions and provides standards for quality control.

¹ Shortened from The IUCN Programme 2009–2012, Shaping a sustainable future, http://www.iucn.org/about/work/global_programme/

Cover photo: Kazbegi region, 2010 by Luc Janssens ©

1. Background Information

1.1. Global importance of the Caucasus ecoregion

The Caucasus ecoregion is considered to be one of the world's 34 biologically richest and most endangered terrestrial ecosystems (Conservation International), one of the Global 200 Ecoregions (WWF), one of the 3 Endemic Bird Areas in Europe (BirdLife International), and one of the world centres of agrobiodiversity. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, located at the heart of the Caucasus, make up about 85 % of the ecoregion's territory, with the other 15% being located in Russia, Turkey and Iran.

1.2. Nature conservation efforts during the last 20 years in the Caucasus

Since becoming independent in the early 1990s, all former Soviet Republics (including countries of the Caucasus ecoregion) developed their own environmental institutions and programmes, largely with assistance from international donors. The expenditure of public funds (state budgets) in nature conservation and natural resources management fields is gradually increasing in each country, but according to various estimates, still represents less than 5 % of the total international donor funds.

Thanks to international assistance programmes, some improvements have been observed in nature conservation in the Caucasus – institutions are stronger than 15-20 years ago, national strategies and policies are better formulated, the capacities and expertise of individuals have increased, as has the total coverage of protected areas. However, the status of biodiversity has not improved: national endangered species' lists are growing, ecosystems and habitats are more fragmented and degraded, habitats loss continues with greater speed, public environmental awareness has not increased appreciably, and environmental agencies remain much weaker than other agencies within governmental structures.

1.3. Major issues, barriers and needs in current nature conservation delivery

According to recent assessments conducted by international organizations in the countries of the Caucasus ecoregion, the major challenges facing biodiversity conservation efforts and root causes of biodiversity loss are: unsustainable use of natural resources linked to high poverty levels and inadequate governance; a dramatically low level of public environmental awareness and participation in environmental decision making; lack of capacities in relevant institutions; and, often unsustainability of results and lack of cooperation among international nature conservation efforts. Many donors, international organizations and national agencies recognize these major challenges and realize the need for improved cooperation/coordination among the different actors. However, no effective platform currently exists in the region to overcome this fundamental roadblock and to facilitate improved conservation delivery and cost effectiveness.

1.4. IUCN history in the South Caucasus

IUCN's presence in the Caucasus ecoregion started in the middle 1990s, when national NGOs joined as members. Until 2007, the region was administered through the IUCN Programme Office for Russia and CIS. In 2007 the Programme Office for the Southern Caucasus (POSC) was established in Tbilisi, Georgia. Membership has significantly increased since then – 6 new members joined during the last two years, including Georgia as a State member. The thematic focus of IUCN POSC during 2007-2010 was on protected areas, biodiversity monitoring, forest governance and environmental awareness. One of the major barriers to achieving IUCN's mission has been the induced competition with its own members for the same funds, as the available donor funds for the region are usually disbursed on a competitive basis.

2. Part of the solution: The IUCN Caucasus Cooperation Centre

Directly responding to the evident challenges in the Caucasus, IUCN intends to establish a new institutional structure - the IUCN Caucasus Cooperation Centre (IUCN CCC). Transforming IUCN's presence from a Programme Office focused on project implementation into a Cooperation Centre means providing services and support to all actors to jointly improve the effectiveness of nature conservation in the region. The IUCN CCC will provide a unique platform for nature conservation related activities and facilitate efforts of all relevant actors in the region.

The IUCN CCC offers three main services (functions) within selected priority programme areas:

Function 1: Promoting improved cooperation among all ongoing programmes

Many donors, international organizations and national agencies recognize the need for improved cooperation/coordination among the different nature conservation actors. To translate this desire for better coordination into action, an effective platform led by a neutral actor is needed. Having government bodies, scientific institutions and NGOs among its members, the global IUCN network can build the bridge needed to bring stakeholders together in order to improve the conservation impact and cost effectiveness of various initiatives. The IUCN CCC will support and facilitate cooperation, coordination and synergies among donors, governments and civil society in the Caucasus ecoregion.

Function 2: Identifying gaps and facilitating new projects and programmes

By carrying out studies and analyses, the IUCN CCC will be able to identify trends, needs and possible gaps within specific sectors in the region and develop recommendations for donors, governments and civil society where to focus their efforts. In addition, the IUCN CCC will regularly share information about global developments in the nature conservation field and will pilot new approaches and introduce best practices.

Function 3: Supporting sustainability and follow-up of existing programmes and projects

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of project and programme results is of paramount importance for the effective delivery of conservation efforts. The IUCN CCC will execute this function on demand through independent assessments of projects and programmes, preparation and participation in appraisal missions and the facilitation of communication with potential donors.

3. Priority programme areas of the IUCN CCC

Three main considerations influenced the selection of the programme areas for the IUCN CCC:

- IUCN's global expertise and programmatic priorities (www.iucn.org)
- The national priorities of the Caucasus countries
- Donors' strategies and priorities in the Caucasus ecoregion

Based on these considerations, two priority programme areas were selected to start operations of IUCN CCC:

Biodiversity Conservation Programme – focus on protected areas and species; and

Natural Resources Management Programme – focus on forests and water.

Within each priority programme area, all three main functions of the IUCN CCC will be exercised and cross-cutting topics such as climate change, policy and governance, capacity building, education, economy and environment will be integrated.

4. IUCN's network approach and implementation mechanisms

IUCN supports the efforts of members, partners and stakeholders by providing a platform and enabling conditions – access to global nature conservation knowledge, facilitation of processes and activities, and effective coordination of specific activities. Each group of stakeholders is organized around a specific thematic area (e.g. protected areas), thus allowing for maximum use of aggregated knowledge within the network. This helps everybody involved to improve conservation practices and develop stronger policy positions, based on scientific data.

Implementation Mechanisms

The following types of activities will be carried out by the IUCN CCC to realize the above functions within the priority programme areas:

- Conducting studies, analyses and assessments of specific sectors (e.g. forestry, water management), projects and programmes in all phases
- Providing access to global nature conservation knowledge through publications in local languages, trainings, and technical assistance to ongoing programmes and projects in the region
- Promoting and supporting dialogues among conservation partners through hosting discussion workshops, seminars, conferences on various topics within priority programme areas
- Supporting cooperation and coordination among donors, governments and civil society by facilitating multi-stakeholder processes and activities
- Communicating nature conservation
- Influencing national and regional policies by raising issues and setting biodiversity on the political agenda
- Building capacities of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders
- Piloting new approaches to conserving biodiversity and managing natural resources

A new institutional structure will be established to realize the IUCN CCC concept and it is foreseen to review it frequently based on achieved results and ongoing developments in the region.

The budget of the IUCN CCC operations will consist of funds from various sources:

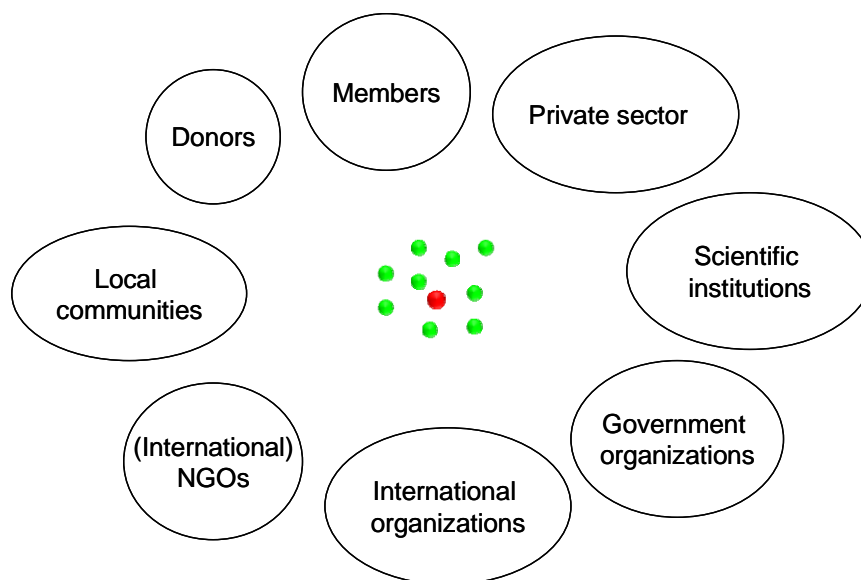
- Funding allocated by IUCN
- IUCN's global and regional projects that include the Caucasus region
- Regional framework agreements and/or project agreements with multi-lateral, bi-lateral donors and private foundations that have active programmes in the Caucasus and are interested in enhanced effectiveness of nature conservation efforts in the Caucasus region.

This concept paper provides a basis for developing project concepts and proposals that may focus on individual topics within the identified programmatic priorities, or those that may support the overall functioning an operations of the IUCN CCC. Illustrative projects may include:

- Establishment of a Water Cooperation Centre in the Caucasus (with the above described functions)
- Conducting a Forest Governance Study in the Caucasus
- Supporting multi-stakeholder cooperation and dialogue on Protected Areas in the Caucasus
- Assistance to Civil Society organizations of the Caucasus countries in conducting endangered species conservation projects and biodiversity monitoring.

5. Beneficiaries and Added value

Nature conservation, and particularly the integration of conservation into other policy sectors, will only work if everybody who has an interest in a particular topic and has their own specific strengths and contributions, is involved. The figure below provides an overview of potential stakeholders within the network of the IUCN CCC. The network is supported by a network coordinator (red colour), and a policy specialist, a group of experts as well as a communications person (green colour).



Benefits for *Civil Society* (including IUCN members)

- ✓ Improved access to global knowledge: IUCN best practice guidelines and other publications in local languages
- ✓ Improved access to expertise: provision of expert input upon request to the projects executed by civil society actors
- ✓ Improved success of fundraising: assistance in projects' development, communication with donors, access to study results
- ✓ Increased capacities: provision of thematic trainings, assistance in organizational development aspects, assistance in project and programme evaluations
- ✓ Increased level of participation in environmental decision making: ensuring civil society actors' involvement in multi-stakeholder dialogue and processes.

Benefits for national Governments and Agencies (including IUCN members)

- ✓ Improved access to global knowledge: IUCN guidelines and other publications in local languages
- ✓ Improved access to expertise: provision of expert input upon request to review and update national strategies, policies and legislation, and to projects executed by government agencies
- ✓ Improved overview of sector-based trends and issues: access to study results
- ✓ Strengthening environmental agencies' roles within governmental structures.

Benefits for Donors (including IUCN members)

- ✓ Improved independent information base: regularly updated country and regional studies on various topics within priority programme areas
- ✓ Improved donor coordination: facilitation of processes to avoid overlapping and duplication and to ensure synergies
- ✓ Improved effectiveness of donor funded projects and programmes in the Caucasus: on demand independent, neutral and high quality evaluation and assessments of donor projects in all stages of implementation in priority programme areas, supporting sustainability of initiated activities.

6. Funding criteria

The following funding options are proposed for potential IUCN CCC Partners:

- A Partner provides support to the IUCN CCC on the basis of sub-regional framework agreements (2 years minimum). The minimum level of support provided by the Partner would be €50,000 per year.
- A Partner provides support to the IUCN CCC on the basis of project agreements. The project proposals derived from this concept paper may focus on individual topics within priority programme areas.
- Partners of the IUCN CCC may be bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors and private foundations who already implement or plan to start programmes in the Caucasus region.

The IUCN CCC hopes to attract at least 4 Partners, to secure a minimum income of €200,000 per year in order to perform the functions mentioned above and which are considered highly valuable, in particular by donors working in the Caucasus region, national governments and agencies and by local civil society.

IUCN will report on the contributions of the IUCN CCC Partners in its annual accounts and/or technical project reports. Meetings of Partners will be organized on an annual basis to report on progress and collect their feedback.

Annex 1. Existing environmental regional actors in the Caucasus and benefit from IUCN CCC

The main services (functions) of the IUCN CCC are:

1. Promoting improved cooperation among all ongoing programmes
2. Identifying gaps and facilitating new projects and programmes
3. Supporting sustainability and follow-up of existing programmes and projects

The most relevant function(s) for each regional actor are indicated below.

Existing regional structures, programmes and actors	Activities, functions, roles	Benefit from IUCN CCC
Caucasus Biodiversity Council (CBC)	The CBC is an advisory board managed by the WWF, providing recommendations on nature protection, biodiversity management and environmental issues in the South Caucasus. It has no decision making power but issues recommendations.	Functions 1 and 2 Regular platform. Larger scope of stakeholders including donors
Caucasus Nature Fund (CNF)	CNF provides long-term financial sustainability for nature protection activities in the South Caucasus within the context of the Ecoregional Conservation Plan, namely for protected areas in the South Caucasus countries.	Function 3 Complementary. Creating the enabling environment for long-term financial sustainability.
CENN (IUCN member)	CENN works at the interface of society and environment, fostering modern and sustainable development values and practices. CENN's activities take place at the local, national and regional levels in the South Caucasus region.	Functions 1, 2 and 3 Regular platform, enabling environment for further development of local civil society organization, effective use of IUCN membership
EC Forest Law and Governance Programme (ENPI-FLEG)	The EC funded ENPI-FLEG <i>programme</i> supports governments, civil society, and the private sector in participating countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine) in the development of sound and sustainable forest management practices, including reducing the incidence of illegal forestry activities. Its aim is to contribute to establishing legal and sustainable forest management and utilization practices, strengthening the rule of law and enhancing local livelihoods.	Functions 1, 2 and 3 Strong potential for synergies, follow up of FLEG programme after second phase ends; potential to extend regional activities
EC Water project	The EC funded regional water programme is based on an integrated management of river basins approach, focusing on the Kura-Aras river basin. The EU helps countries of the Southern Caucasus to protect this river basin through several projects (ca €5 million for Georgia) by developing their water legislation, collecting the necessary data, providing them with laboratory equipment for monitoring of water quality, etc. The EU is also very active in protection of the Black Sea and its coast.	Functions 1, 2 and 3 Backup, multi-stakeholder platform, ensure follow-up
Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) – South Caucasus	ENVSEC aims to couple the environment and security with the explicit goal of bridging conflict divides and transforming risks into cooperation. It provides a forum for discussions, and supports trans-boundary cooperation.	Functions 1, 2 and 3 Enabling environment for successful implementation of activities. Regular platform.

<p>GTZ Biodiversity Programme under the German Caucasus Initiative</p>	<p>The Biodiversity Programme works on reforming selected legal frameworks, strengthening the capacities of the Ministries of the Environment, and communicating matters of importance concerning the environment. On a local level, conditions and structures for sustainable management in commercial forests and in protected areas are created. <i>The German Caucasus Initiative</i> supports political and economic cooperation activities of the Southern Caucasus republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and also places country-specific bilateral development cooperation in a regional context.</p>	<p>Functions 1, 2 and 3 Regular platform, access to global knowledge, ensuring follow-up of specific activities</p>
<p>KfW Ecoregional Nature Conservation Program for the South Caucasus</p>	<p>The programme is financed by the German KfW to support individual protected areas and also the Trans-boundary Joint Secretariat (TJS). It aims at supporting the Ministries of Environment of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan in their endeavours in the sectors of nature conservation and socio-economic development.</p>	<p>Functions 1, 2 and 3 Long-term structure, allowing for follow up of TJS after project ends, mutual support and backup by IUCN structures during project</p>
<p>The Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (REC Caucasus)</p>	<p>The REC Caucasus was founded to support sustainable development and work on environmental issues like the Local Agenda 21 on a regional level in the South Caucasus. It supports building the civil society through promotion of public participation in decision-making process, development of free exchange of information and encouragement of cooperation at national and regional level among NGOs, governments, businesses, local communities and all other stakeholders.</p>	<p>Functions 1, 2 and 3 Use of a large and regular platform, access to global knowledge, outreach beyond Caucasus, Complementary</p>
<p>WWF Caucasus</p>	<p>WWF in the Caucasus focuses on conserving critical places, selected protected areas, and critical species that are particularly important for their habitat or for people. WWF also initiates thematic processes and works on the policy level.</p>	<p>Functions 1, 2 and 3 Creation of an enabling environment for pursuing interests and implementing activities</p>