



Case study // Round Table SDG 15: Biodiversity at the Heart of Sustainable Development - Toward Transformation and Resilience

Earth Observation technologies designed for action

Georgia

Level: national

Summary

Global Forest Watch (GFW), is a web based platform that provides data and analysis tools to monitor forests and detect unsustainable activities. Georgia is also developing Data Cube technology, a monitoring tool (impact assessment, change detection) to help mainstream biodiversity and integrate environmental policies into the political agenda.

Situation

The Ministry of Environment Protection and Agriculture together with World Resources Institute (WRI) are carrying out the GFW project in Georgia, funded by GEF. The project is being implemented together with GIZ and Caucasus Environmental NGO Network.

Unique GFW technology developed by WRI is used worldwide to analyse and report on forest loss, forest and land degradation, illegal logging, biodiversity, etc. The data is constantly updated on the global web portal (<http://www.globalforestwatch.org>). GFW is free and simple to use, enabling anyone to create custom maps, analyse forest trends, subscribe to alerts, or download data for their local area or the entire world.

A national web portal (<http://geo.forest-atlas.org/>) is currently being established in Georgia, where all nationally and globally relevant data including forest inventories and forest management plans, as well as other data on the use of natural resources and land use, are integrated and visualized using this unique technology. The portal's user-friendly tools allow users to easily share information and provide on-the-fly analyses, which will run in English and Georgian languages. The technology will allow visualisation and qualitative/ quantitative analysis of current status of Georgian forests and will fill in informational and analytical gaps, promoting better decision-making, monitoring and forest rehabilitation in the forest landscapes of Georgia.

Strategy

Global Forest Watch in Georgia is using a “bottom up” approach by engaging with stakeholders who would be users and beneficiaries of the web portal to identify gaps in existing data and to understand data utilization at cross-sectorial levels for improved actions and decisions in forest and land use planning. Next, existing local and national data was collected and cleaned or new data developed to be integrated into the web-based “Forest and Land Use Information Decision Support” (FLUIDS) system. FLUIDS is based on already existing GFW technology and global data and provides on-the-fly analyses, which provide insights into the state of Georgia’s forests and help Georgia report on its international commitments. Capacity building is a major component of the project to ensure long term sustainability, maintenance and relevance of the web portal and includes awareness raising and public communication.

Results and impact

The actions supported the improved cooperation between governmental, non-governmental and scientific institutions, resulting:

- High level commitment and cross-sectorial support for utilization of up-to-date and accurate data in decision making; Processing and visualization of existing data-sets for improved monitoring of forest landscapes and biodiversity;
- Compelling analyses for improved decision making to support sustainable management of forested landscapes and biodiversity;
- Enhanced knowledge to map, plan, and analyze risks in forest habitats in accordance with European EUNIS classification system;
- Increased capacity and tools to create thematic maps out of the forest inventory (& management plans) data-sets;

Challenges and lessons learned

Main challenges of the project in Georgia include:

- A lack of capacity and an insufficient number of qualified specialists within partner agencies and organizations
- Unsustainable use of natural resources
- Institutional instability that significantly slows down development processes.

To address these challenges, significant effort was applied to strengthen the coordination between stakeholders. The project took a participatory approach to identify the key Indicators to collect applicable data and improve measuring the level of “maintenance, conservation and appropriate enhancement of biological diversity in forest ecosystems” towards Sustainable Forest Management. In addition, the project created a technical working group that allows for direct ownership over project outcomes and capacity building workshops are being developed to increase knowledge on use and maintenance of the portal.



Potential for replication

The experience described above can be replicated and implemented throughout the South Caucasus and Central Asian countries with similar socio-economic conditions, including high demand on natural resources and low capacities at administrative levels of law enforcement in the field of forest ecosystems, including the lack of experience in utilizing the web based geographic information and decision support tools.

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