



SIXTH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

“ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE”

BELGRADE, SERBIA

10-12 October 2007

**STRENGTHENING ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE
IN EASTERN EUROPE, CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA THROUGH
LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PROGRAMMES**

submitted by

the Regional Environmental Centres
for Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia

through the Ad Hoc Working Group of Senior Officials

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT



UNITED NATIONS

LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PLANS



This report was prepared and issued by The Regional Environmental Centres for the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, with financial support of the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM)

VROM ● ● ● ●



Sixth Ministerial Conference
“Environment for Europe”
Belgrade, 10-12 October 2007
Item 5 (a) of the provisional agenda

CAPACITY-BUILDING

PROGRESS AND PERSPECTIVES IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT
STRATEGY FOR COUNTRIES OF EASTERN EUROPE, CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL
ASIA, AND OF THE CENTRAL ASIA INITIATIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

STRENGTHENING ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE IN EASTERN EUROPE, CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA THROUGH LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PROGRAMMES

Executive Summary

Regional Environmental Centres' (RECs) in Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia (EECCA) have promoted local environmental action programs (LEAPs) the last five years as a means of strengthening environmental governance at the local level. Environmental governance is about environmental decisions and how we make them. Our experience has found that LEAPs are effective tools for addressing environmental problems, raising public awareness, expanding public access to information, and increasing public involvement in local environmental issues. Further, LEAPs have shown themselves to be effective approaches to improving local decision-making by involving key stakeholders at the local level. In addition, LEAPs improve accountability and transparency of local government by forming partnerships between local government and civil society and providing a mechanism for direct public input into governmental decisions.

EECCA RECs' experience to date has focused on implementing pilot projects in selected communities, disseminating information about local approaches to environmental management, and building the capacity of organizations in each country to assist in LEAP development and implementation. Further support is needed to broaden and deepen the impact of LEAPs by institutionalizing LEAPs at the national level, increasing the number of communities implementing LEAPs, and establishing a network of LEAP communities throughout the region. EECCA RECs can play important roles working with national governments to develop LEAP requirements, train professionals in the LEAP methodology, disseminate LEAP information to the general public, promote sharing of experiences among local governments, and manage LEAP pilot projects for trans-boundary and other special situations. This report contributes to the session on “Environment Strategy for EECCA.”

CONTENTS

	Paragraph	Page
I: BACKGROUND	1-12	3-7
A. Institutional Needs Addressed	2-6	3-4
B. History of LEAPs in EECCA	7-9	4
C. Relevance to Belgrade Conference	10-11	4-5
D. Process for Preparing the Report	12	5-6
II: RESULTS TO DATE	13-52	6-13
A. Strengthened Environmental Governance	14-32	6-10
B. Improved Environmental Conditions	33-43	10-12
C. Increased Long-Term Capacity	44-52	12-13
III: DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES	53	13-16
A. Central Asia		13
B. Moldova		14
C. Russia		15
D. South Caucasus		15-16
IV: LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS	54-57	16-20
A. Lessons Learned		16-18
B. Future Directions		18-20
C. Role of EECCA Regional Environmental Centers	56-57	20
ATTACHMENT:		
RESOLUTION of International Conference “ Local Environmental Action Plans: Experience and Achievements of EECCA RECs”		21

I. BACKGROUND

1. This section briefly addresses the institutional needs being addressed, provides a brief history of LEAPs in EECCA, explains the relevance of this report to the Belgrade conference, and provides an overview of the process for developing this report.

A. Institutional Needs Addressed:

2. Over the last several years, a number of environmental problems have surfaced in EECCA countries that pose severe ecological, public health, and economic impacts to the region. Air and water pollution, toxic and hazardous waste contamination, and soil degradation threaten public health and damage natural ecosystems. A significant burden of environmental disease persists, unaffordable water infrastructure systems are crumbling, urban air pollution is on the increase due to rapid motorization, and waste and chemicals management is largely deficient.¹ Local governments in EECCA lack experience in identifying environmental priorities, targeting limited resources to the most serious environmental problems, and implementing local actions designed to reduce human and ecological health risks.

3. Further, under recent laws, local governments in many EECCA countries have been given broad, new responsibilities to address environmental problems. Local governments in many EECCA countries have been given the following environmental responsibilities, among others:

- (a) Managing solid waste
- (b) Controlling the disposal of dangerous substances on their territory
- (c) Providing clean and adequate supplies of drinking water
- (d) Managing wastewater
- (e) Controlling air pollution emissions from transport and local heating sources
- (f) Protecting and maintaining green areas
- (g) Planning for and controlling land-uses
- (h) Educating the public about environmental issues

4. This shift to decentralization is an important aspect of the transition to democracy. The new emphasis on local control of environmental problems recognizes that local governments and their citizens have the best understanding of local problems, issues, and needs. By decentralizing decision-making authority, environmental actions can be tailored to meet the specific needs of a community or region.

5. Unfortunately, local governments in EECCA have a relative lack of experience in local self-governance. They often lack experience on how to actively engage the public in local decisions, ensure public access to environmental information, and make decisions that are transparent and accountable.

¹ *Taking Stock of Environmental Management Challenges in Eastern Europe*, October 2004. Environment Directorate, Environment Policy Committee, Task Force for the Implementation of the Environmental Action Programme for Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. Conference of EECCA Environment Ministers and their Partners, Tbilisi, Georgia.

6. LEAPs can be an effective vehicle for helping communities address priority environmental issues while ensuring that a broad range of community stakeholders are involved in a decision-making process that reflects communities preferences.

B. History of LEAPs in EECCA:

7. RECs in EECCA have been active in promoting local environmental governance in the region. In 2003, the RECs jointly implemented the project, "Strengthening Local Environmental Governance in EECCA Countries" which was designed to raise awareness about the best practices of local environmental decision-making and identify ways to strengthen local environmental democracy and public participation in the region. The project aimed to promote cooperation and experience between the countries of the EECCA region, with Central and Eastern European (CEE) and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. It assisted the EECCA RECs in building their capacity for the implementation of policy-related projects and in formulating their strategy for the promotion of LEAPs in the EECCA.

8. As a result, the EECCA RECs prepared a strategy and implemented a number of LEAP pilot activities throughout the region. This strategy, "LEAPs as a Tool for Public Participation in Environmental Decision-Making in EECCA Countries" has been designed to exchange experiences about and identify ways to strengthen local environmental governance, planning, and management in EECCA. Specific objectives of this joint project include:

- (a) Promote the cooperation and exchange of experiences on local environmental governance and decision-making among EECCA, CEE, and OECD countries;
- (b) Strengthen the capacity of RECs to implement local governance, environmental policy, and environmental planning projects;
- (c) Revise and improve the RECs strategy for promoting LEAPs in the EECCA region to ensure effective and coherent implementation; and,
- (d) Discuss the role of civil society and NGOs in local environmental governance and identify actions to promote public participation in local environmental decision-making.

9. This report provides a summary of the major results from the EECCA RECs work in promoting LEAPs over the past three years.

C. Relevance to Belgrade Conference:

10. This report contributes to the session on the *Environment Strategy for Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia* (EECCA) under the Capacity Building element of the Belgrade conference. The overall objective of the Environment Strategy is to:

"contribute to improving environmental conditions and to implementing the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Plan of Implementation in the EECCA by strengthening efforts of these countries in environmental protection and by facilitating partnership and cooperation between EECCA countries, countries of United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region, including all stakeholders."

11. LEAPs help fulfil a number of objectives identified in the EECCA Environment Strategy, including:
- (a) Reducing the risks to human health through pollution prevention and control;
 - (b) Establishing and strengthening mechanisms for mobilizing and allocating financial resources to achieve environmental objectives; and,
 - (c) Strengthen public participation in environmental decision-making.

D. Process for Preparing the Report:

12. This report is drawn from the direct experiences of communities in ten EECCA countries in developing and/or implementing LEAPs. In December 2006, representatives from communities and the RECs joined together in Tbilisi for an international conference, “Development and Implementation of LEAPs in EECCA Countries: Experience and Achievements of REC’s Network.” Conference participants met for two days to share their experiences, lessons learned, and recommendations on how to improve environmental governance at the local level in the EECCA region. Conference participants approved a resolution expressing strong support for expanding LEAPs in the region (see Attachment A: Resolution of International Conference Local Environmental Action Plans: Experience and Achievements of RECs of EECCA Countries). EECCA RECs also prepared a newsletter summarizing the results of their LEAP-related activities over the last six years (see Attachment B: LEAPs in EECCA Countries).

Seven Elements of Environmental Governance²

- 1) **Institutions and Laws:** *Who makes and enforces the rules for using natural resources? ■ What are the rules and the penalties for breaking them? ■ Who resolves disputes?* Government ministries; regional water or pollution control boards; local zoning departments and governing councils; international bodies such as the United Nations or World Trade Organization; industry trade organizations. ■ Environmental and economic laws, policies, rules, treaties, and enforcement regimes; corporate codes of conduct. ■ Courts and administrative review panels.
- 2) **Participation Rights and Representation:** *How can the public influence or contest the rules over natural resources? ■ Who represents those who use or depend on natural resources when decisions on these resources are made?* Freedom of Information laws; public hearings, reviews, and comment periods on environmental plans and actions; ability to sue in court, lodge a complaint, or demand an administrative review of a rule or decision. ■ Elected legislators, appointed representatives, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) representing local people or other environmental stakeholders.
- 3) **Authority Level:** *At what level or scale—local, regional, national, international—does the authority over resources reside?* Visible in: Distribution of official rulemaking, budgeting, and investment power at different levels of government (e.g., district forest office; regional air pollution control board; national agriculture ministry; international river basin authority).

² World Resources 2002-2004: Decisions for the Earth: Balance, voice, and power. United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, World Bank, World Resources Institute.

- 4) **Accountability and Transparency:** *How do those who control and manage natural resources answer for their decisions, and to whom? ■ How open to scrutiny is the decision-making process?* Mechanisms: Elections; public oversight bodies; performance reviews; opinion polls; financial audits; corporate boards of directors; stockholder meetings. ■ Availability of public records of rules, decisions, and complaints; corporate financial statements; public inventories of pollutant releases from industrial facilities, power plants, and water treatment facilities.
- 5) **Property Rights and Tenure:** *Who owns a natural resource or has the legal right to control it?* Visible in: Land titles; water, mineral, fishing, or other use rights; tribal or traditional community-based property rights; logging, mining, and park recreation concessions.
- 6) **Markets and Financial Flows:** *How do financial practices, economic policies, and market behavior influence authority over natural resources?* Visible in: Private sector investment patterns and lending practices; government aid and lending by multilateral development banks; trade policies and tariffs; corporate business strategies; organized consumer activities such as product boycotts or preferences; stockholder initiatives related to company environmental behavior.
- 7) **Science and Risk:** *How are ecological and social science incorporated into decisions on natural resource use to reduce risks to people and ecosystems and identify new opportunities?*

II. RESULTS TO DATE

13. RECs in EECCA have realized the following results as a consequence of implementing LEAPs over the last three years:

- A) Strengthened Environmental Governance
- B) Improved Environmental Conditions
- C) Increased Long-Term Capacity

A. Strengthened Environmental Governance.

14. LEAPs have strengthened environmental governance in communities throughout the EECCA region by:

Increased public awareness of and access to information on environmental issues. LEAPs have increased public awareness of and access to information on environmental issues. For example, LEAP pilot communities have compiled information about local environmental conditions – which often represented the first time this information was assembled and shared with the public. With greater public awareness, comes greater public involvement in environmental issues.

15. EECCA RECs utilized the following tools to raise public awareness and increase access to information:

- (a) Prepared guidelines on public participation in the environmental decision-making process and the development of the local environmental action plans;
- (b) Prepared summary reports on environmental conditions and the main environmental

- problems in pilot communities;
- (c) Developed maps of the main pollution sources of the community;
 - (d) Disseminated information to the mass media, including articles in local and national newspapers, and participation of stakeholder group members in national and local TV and radio programs;
 - (e) Invited representatives of civil society organizations to participate in seminars and as members of local stakeholder groups;
 - (f) Published information bulletins about the LEAP development, the state of environment, priority environmental problems, and ways of raising public participation in environmental decision-making;
 - (g) Conducted public surveys of environmental concerns; and,
 - (h) Prepared local environmental action plans containing assessments of environmental conditions and measures for addressing priority environmental issues.

16. For example, in the Stefan Voda district, Moldova, four quarterly bulletins were prepared containing information about the results of the public survey, priority environmental problems and ways for solving these problems, results of the water testing from local wells, and opinions of different environmental stakeholders on environmental problems. The bulletin was disseminated among all the stakeholders of the district, including the county council, environmental and health authorities, local public administration, NGOs, schools, and the local population.

17. The Stephan Voda stakeholder group also conducted a public survey on the environmental situation in the district. The results revealed that the population was aware of the priority environmental problems and believe that the most urgent problem was water pollution and the lack of waste management. As a result, the local authorities and stakeholder group members conducted a number of tests on drinking water quality in the most commonly used wells. Experts from the local environmental and health authorities informed the population about the most polluted wells, explained the pollution sources, and provided information on ways to improve water quality.

18. In the South Caucasus, the REC Caucasus prepared training materials and a manual for Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia on how citizens can participate in local government decision-making process for environmental protection. Pilot cities in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia prepared reports on local environmental conditions with the aid of environmental experts and the stakeholders. These reports were prepared in a summary form for the general public in Russian and national languages.

Improved local decision-making. LEAPs have improved local decision-making by involving key stakeholders at the local level. LEAP communities have formed multi-stakeholder groups composed of a broad cross-section of the community to develop and oversee the implementation of the local environmental action plans. These stakeholder groups have contributed to the decision making role of the community at the local level by building consensus between different parties and providing input in the settlement of different environmental problems.

19. In pilot communities, stakeholder groups consisted of anywhere between 25-50 people. The main stakeholders who participated in the implementation of LEAP projects included representatives of:

- (a) Local government, including elected town/city councils and staff;
- (b) Regional branches of the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Health;
- (c) Environmental and other non-governmental organizations in the community;
- (d) Mass media;
- (e) Health and environmental professionals, such as doctors, teachers, and university professors;
- (f) Business community, including municipal enterprises and private businesses;
- (g) Interested members of the public, including students and town elders; and,
- (h) Professionals and experts in environmental planning.

20. NGOs have been the driving force of the stakeholder groups. In general, NGOs have shown high motivation and levels of activity, and have played a decisive role in the successful implementation of LEAP projects in the pilot cities. Participation of NGOs in the entire LEAP process guarantees its stability, continuity, and achievement of the anticipated results because the local NGOs often are almost the only party that manages to preserve its status and functions in the environment of instability and frequent changes of the official authorities.

21. In the Pervomaisky district of the Yaroslavl oblast and in Korablinsky district of Ryazan oblasts, pupils of secondary schools provided an important input to the overall success and formulation of the LEAPs. In both cities, elder schoolchildren participated in the meetings of the LEAPs working groups and provided important advice in the preparation of the action plan. Further, in the Yaroslavl oblast of Russia, local women councils were represented on the stakeholder group and significantly influenced the issue of improving municipal waste disposal and management.

22. In Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, the stakeholders groups are composed of participants with a relative balance from different sectors of the community. For example, of the 108 people directly participating in the stakeholders committees in three pilot communities (one in each country), the representation included: 20% from local government, 20% from local NGOs, 8% from mass media, and 22% local universities and schools. Local governments in each pilot community signed a memorandum of understanding with the REC-Caucasus in which they committed themselves to implementing recommendations developed by the stakeholder group. Currently, each stakeholder group is continuing to meet and monitor implementation activities identified in the local environmental action plans. In the South Caucasus, women in Georgia and Armenia were particularly active on the stakeholder groups.

23. In the Stefan Voda district of the Republic of Moldova, the Public Advisory Council (stakeholder group) included representatives of all the environmental stakeholders (county councils, local environmental and health authorities, NGOs, business community, teachers, doctors, journalists) as well as the mayors of all the 24 villages of the Stefan Voda district.

Improved accountability and transparency of local government. LEAPs have improved the accountability and transparency of local government through two mechanisms. First, local governments adopt local environmental action plans that have been developed by multi-

stakeholder groups. Second, these action plans then guide local government environmental policy and investments. Recommendations in the action plans from LEAP pilot communities have been incorporated into local government budgets, land-use development plans, and other statutory planning processes.

24. EECCA RECs have urged pilot communities to have city councils and local administrations approve their local environmental action plans as official documents of the government. It is especially important the action plans, which have been elaborated with the active participation of key stakeholders in the community, are approved by local authorities to give them official status.

25. For example, the Stefan Voda District Council approved the local environmental action plan with a set of priority projects. This decision expressed the commitment of the district council and the local governments to implement the activities included in the action plan, including specific investments that received financial support of national and international donors. Local governments also supported environmental lessons in schools, environmental contests, planting of green areas, and public awareness activities.

26. In Pervomaisky district of the Yaroslavl oblast, recommendations from the action plan and one of the follow-up project proposals resulted in the development of a local ecotourism investment project -- thus contributing to increased employment opportunities in the region. In the Shatura district of the Moscow oblast, the action plan resulted in the local administration protecting biodiversity resources.

27. In Dushanbe, Tajikistan, the stakeholder group prepared a local environmental action plan that was integrated with the socio-economic development plan of the city. The action plan helped the City administration secure \$6,000,000 USD from the Swedish Agency for Development to construct a new solid waste processing facility. In Kutaisi, Georgia, the City Council doubled the 2007 budget for waste management and city cleaning, reconstructed a central park, and expanded greenery projects – corresponding with actions identified in the action plan.

Increased citizen involvement in addressing local environmental issues. LEAPs have resulted in increased citizen involvement in addressing local environmental issues. Citizens in LEAP communities have implemented a broad range of environmental actions, including planting trees, repairing wells, and cleaning up illegal disposal sites.

28. The REC Caucasus initiated a small grants program to provide funding for projects ranging from environmental awareness and education initiatives to low-cost, pollution reduction and environmental improvements in each of the LEAP cities. This included small grants from local governments to encourage partnerships with businesses and/or NGOs, as well as small grants for NGOs. Projects addressed improving drinking water supplies and irrigation systems, improving waste management, planting of greenery, and raising environmental awareness.

29. For example, in Kutaisi, Georgia, the stakeholder group came forward with several initiatives that improved cooperation with the local authorities, including a resolution on adopting annual “Greenery Days.” As a result, stakeholder group members spearheaded an effort

to plant 2000 trees in eight city gardens, including 400 trees and bushes in one newly commissioned territory. Further, three illegal waste disposal sites were cleaned-up and eliminated.

30. In the Pervomaisky and Korablinsky districts, local school children and teachers initiated cleaning of the local waste sites and developed specialized biodiversity protection sites. In both communities, children participated in environmental photo contests and a contest for environmental compositions.

31. In the Yakkasaroy district of Tashkent city, Uzbekistan, the NGO, Armon, implemented the project, "Wastes to Wages" which established a rational method for handling domestic solid waste, including selective collection and processing of recyclable materials – while also increasing income and employment opportunities for areas residents.

32. In Moldova, "Greenery Days" are marked in April each year. In the Stefan Voda district, Moldova, on Greenery Days over a two year period, the citizens planted 30,000 trees throughout the district.

B. Improved Environmental Conditions.

33. LEAPs have resulted in quantitative improvements in environmental conditions by:

Increased environmental investments at the local level. LEAPs involve the preparation of local action plans that describe the most effective approaches for addressing priority environmental issues. Local governments in EECCA are increasing their contribution of local resources, as well as national and donor funding, to address environmental issues.

34. For example, in the Stefan Voda district, the LEAP has resulted in securing funding from the Dutch government in the amount of 40,000 Euro to improve water quality and waste management, expand public access to environmental information, and strengthen public participation in environmental decision-making process. In addition, numerous activities have been already been implemented within other environmental projects and initiatives that were consistent with the local environmental action plan totally over 50,000 Euros, including projects related to water supply and sanitation, liquidation of illegal dumps, creation of green belts for agricultural lands and water basins protection, and improving public access to environmental information. Those projects were supported by the World Bank and the National Environmental Fund of the Republic of Moldova.

35. In Georgia, the City of Kutaisi received seven million Euro from the Millennium Challenge Georgia Fund and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Authority, three 3 million Euro in credit from the European Reconstruction and Development Bank, and allocated 1.9 Georgian lari (approximately 1.2 million USD) from the local budget to fund an urban water supply project. The project is currently being implemented to rehabilitate the water supply system and improve the city's potable water. This project was one of the top priorities of Kutaisi's LEAP.

36. In Korablinsky district of Ryzan oblast of Russia total environmental expenditures within the framework of the LEAP made up more than 557 thousand US dollars. They are mainly aimed at restoration of forests, protection and cleaning of water bodies and improving the system of municipal waste management.

37. In the Dzhizak oblast of Uzbekistan, the local administration reconstructed the drinking water supply system that resulted in an additional 2000 people have access to clean drinking water supplies thereby decreasing the incidences of intestinal disease. Funding came from a variety of sources, including the National Environmental Foundation, REC-Central Asia, and local administration.

Increased implementation of environmental projects: LEAPs emphasize action implementation as an integral follow-up to the planning process -- with active stakeholder oversight. LEAP pilot projects in EECCA have resulted in increased number of environmental projects that result in measurable improvements in environmental quality.

38. For example, in the South Caucasus, the REC-Caucasus is providing implementation funding for three pilot communities in the amount of \$96,000 to fund priority projects identified in each local environmental action plan. Grant funds are being used to fund projects related to improving drinking water supply, reducing river pollution, improving waste management, improving green areas, and raising environmental awareness of the population. Projects for municipalities were co financed by local governments - up to 25%.

39. In Kutaisi, Georgia, the City constructed a well and expanded water supply for 25% of the population, constructed parks for children, eliminated illegal landfills, while four local schools have organized environmental protection activities.

40. The City received a grant from the European Union's Tacis Cities Award Scheme (TCAS) program in the amount of 160,000 Euros to improve the city's solid waste management system -- consistent with recommendations in the action plan. As a result, 25% of the city's population will be involved in the collection of plastic and paper for recycling. Special attention will be paid to increase the overall environmental awareness of the local population and their participation in the implementation of environmental protection activities. Already, over 100 families have participated in a pilot project to source separate waste for recycling. Further, the Netherlands Embassy contributed 8,000 Euro for a local composting project organized by a local NGO. In addition, the Black Sea Ecosystem Recovery Program provided a grant of 8,000 USD to increase the role of the public in reducing river pollution of the Rioni River which ultimately empties into the Black Sea.

41. In Ganja, Azerbaijan, the City constructed a new laboratory of ecological monitoring of Lake Gel-Gel – the source of the city's drinking water supply, established a new park, eliminated illegal landfills, and with the help of local citizens and students – planted trees at the site of former illegal waste sites.

42. In Ararat, Armenia, the City repaired the water supply system and pump station for irrigation, expanded the water supply system for a refuge settlement area, planted new green

areas at local schools, and implemented nature protection activities with the participation of citizens and students.

43. The REC–Central Asia provided small grant financing for five LEAP projects in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan with an average of 5000 Euro per project. Results included expanding drinking water supply for 10,000 people, cleaning channels and riverbeds, and rehabilitating water storage facilities. Almost every project was co-financed -- up to 50% -- by the local authorities or communities.

C. Increased Long-Term Capacity.

44. The RECs in EECCA have increased the capacity to assist communities in the region to implement LEAPs by:

Increased number of citizens and municipal staff trained in environmental management:

Working as participants in community-based stakeholder groups, citizens and municipal staff have received trainings on how to develop local environmental action plans and manage local environmental issues.

45. For example, the REC-Caucasus trained stakeholder committee members in the LEAP methodology by organizing the local trainings - one in each pilot city – with a total participation of over 100 people. Participants included representatives of the local governments, environmental protection agencies and NGOs. Further, were organized three regional trainings in Georgia with aim to train seven experts from each country in the LEAP methodology to provide consultations to stakeholder group members in pilot cities.

46. In Moldova, capacity building was an integral component of all LEAPs designed to increase the capacity of all environmental stakeholders of the communities to address environmental problems over the long-term, including district authorities, local public administration, and local environmental and health authorities, who participated in trainings on local environmental planning and action. In case of the Stefan Voda LEAP, the accent was put on training the members of the Public Advisory Council who are responsible for promoting and monitoring the implementation of the LEAP.

Increased number of new communities that are implementing LEAPs: Several EECCA countries have started to initiate LEAPs in a second round of pilot projects. For example,

47. in 2007 the REC-Caucasus started a second round of the LEAP pilot communities, with one new pilot community in each South Caucasus countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The REC-Caucasus is in the process of conducting an evaluation of LEAP activities conducted in first three pilot communities. In Moldova, the LEAP process started in 1998 when the first pilot LEAPs were developed for Ungheni, Orhei and Cahul counties of Moldova. The most recent LEAP in Moldova was developed in 2005 for the Stefan Voda district. The LEAPs were developed for both the administrative units of the countries and for the municipalities.

Prepared guidance materials and widely disseminated information about LEAPs: The EECCA RECs have prepared training materials, informational brochures, and guidance documents on how to implement LEAPs to municipalities throughout the region.

48. In Russia, the REC-Russia prepared several special documents related to LEAP development, local environmental planning and planning on sustainable development for municipalities, including the publication, “Local Environmental Action Plans in Russia and the Aarhus Convention: Priorities, Experience, Problems, Prospects.”

49. In the South Caucasus, the REC-Caucasus developed “Guideline for LEAPs implementation in South Caucasus” in Russian and English languages. The guideline is intended for local communities interested in developing and implementing LEAPs. To disseminate widely information about LEAPs were organized national trainings for local authorities in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The representatives from different cities (14 cities in each country) received training in LEAPs methodology and learned about “best practice” of Local planning existing in the South Caucasus.

50. The REC-Central Asia developed trainers handbook for use by local NGOs in implementing LEAPs in pilot communities that has been translated into national languages and adopted to the local conditions of the Turkmenistan and Tajikistan.

51. REC-Moldova prepared a guidance document on public participation in LEAPs development and implementation. The guidance was disseminated to all the environmental stakeholders of the Ungheni county -- the region where LEAP was implemented, as well as other counties in Moldova country during seminars on the local environmental planning for the members of the local public administration and NGOs.

52. In 2006 was issued the RECs joint newsletter “LEAPs in EECCA countries”, where the experience and achievements in the field of local environmental planning, as well as the results of concrete environmental projects implemented in cities of EECCA region with close cooperation of local government to support LEAPs, are broadly covered. The first issue of newsletter was disseminated on LEAPs international Conference (December, 2006, Tbilisi). The second issue of newsletter will be prepared and disseminated by the sixth “Environment for Europe” ministerial conference in Belgrade.

III. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

53. RECs in EECCA have been actively involved in implementing pilot LEAP projects throughout EECCA, including the following:

A. Central Asia:

- (a) **Tajikistan:** *Public participation in development of programme for environmental management of City of Dushanbe.* Resulted in the preparation of an environmental management program for the capital city of Dushanbe with broad stakeholder input. Program included the preparation of financial documents to attract finances for specific environmental investments. Launched a pilot project on water supply in one of the regions.

- (b) **Uzbekistan:** *Improving water supply to Tangatoldi and Oikor Kishlaks of Bakhmali District.* A local NGO, Armon Centre, identified lack of access to clean drinking water as a major problem in the district and attracted both external and internal funds to construct a new water intake facility and install new water filters. Also, in the City of Hanabad, the local stakeholder group prepared a *Strategic Environment Management Plan 2005-2007* for the city.
- (c) **Kazakhstan:** *Rehabilitation of water supply systems in villages of Ili-Balkhash region.* The goal of this project was to provide a sustainable supply of safe drinking water for the local populations in four villages with the active involvement of local communities and local authorities.
- (d) **Kyrgyzstan:** Prepared an analysis of the possibilities for rehabilitating the Bishkek Environment.
- (e) **Turkmenistan:** Implemented the LEAP methodology at the village level.

B. Moldova:

- (a) *Development of Local Environmental Action Plans in the Ungheni County (2000):* Resulted in the development of a local environmental action plan with priority environmental projects. Within the project, a Public Advisory Council was established to promote and monitor the implementation of the LEAP. In order to promote the implementation of the LEAP, a public information campaign was implemented.
- (b) *Development of LEAPs for Edinet county (2002)* A survey on the environmental situation of the county was developed within the project and priority environmental problems of the county identified. The main environmental stakeholders of the county were trained on the local environmental planning and strengthening public participation in environmental decision-making process.
- (c) *Development of Local Environmental Action Program for the Stefan Voda district (2004-2005):* successful collaboration between local public administration, NGOs, and business communities which led to the development of a successful LEAP.
- (d) *Small grants programme for municipalities and local NGOs to support the implementation of the LEAP in Stefan Voda (2006-2007)*
The program, financially supported by the Dutch Government foresees the implementation of 9 out of 25 priority projects included in the LEAP Stefan Voda. The projects, which will be financed under this program, relate to the liquidation of the illegal dumps and improvement of the waste management in different communities, strengthening public participation in environmental decision-making process, stopping the land erosion process, and planting of trees to protect the water basins.
- (e) *Transboundary LEAP for the neighbouring settlements of Otaci, Moldova and Moghilev Podolski, Ukraine (2001):* A joint local environmental action plan was developed and approved by municipalities, a public advisory council was established from both communities, and the communities worked toward addressing joint problems. A local environmental NGO was established to promote and monitor the implementation of the LEAP. Though, due to lack of funding the activities included in the LEAP were not implemented.

C. Russia:

- (a) *Development and implementation of the local environmental action plan on environmental protection and sustainable development of the Shatura District of the Moscow oblast.* The plan was approved by the local council of deputies. Currently, the district is focusing on improving drinking water quality in rural settlements and implementing a decentralized system of recycling and solid waste management.
- (b) *Development and implementation of local environmental action plan of the Pervomaiskii district of Yaroslavl oblast.* This plan was approved by the district assembly and head of the local administration. Currently, the district is focusing on implementing the following priority projects: organizing centralized collection of solid domestic waste and reconstruction of existing disposal sites, and cleaning of local water bodies with the active participation of the local population.
- (c) *Development and implementation of the local environmental action plan for Korablinsky municipality of the Ryazan oblast of Russia.* The plan has been approved by local administration and local council of representatives. At present major environmental projects within the framework of the LEAP include the following projects: restoration of forest resources of the district; prevention of pollution of surface water bodies; introduction of an improved system of municipal waste management.

D. South Caucasus:

- (a) **Armenia:** *Development and implementation of a local environmental action plan in the City of Ararat (2003-2005).* Priority issues identified included: air pollution, lack of green areas and obsolete irrigation system, inadequate state of drinking water supply, inadequate wastewater disposal system, low level of environmental education, and inadequate solid waste management. City is in the process of implementing actions for improving air quality from industrial enterprises located in the city.
- (b) **Azerbaijan:** *Development and implementation of a local environmental action plan in the City of Ganja (2003-2005).* Priority issues identified included: air pollution, ineffective solid waste management, degradation of green area, pollution of surface and ground waters, low level of environmental education, and poor sanitary-hygienic and epidemiological conditions. City is the process of implementing activities related to improving air quality, waste management system, and monitoring of water quality in Gel-Gel Lake.
- (c) **Georgia:** *Development and implementation of a local environmental action plan for the City of Kutaisi (2003-2005).* Priority issues identified included: Insufficient supply quality drinking water, pollution of surface waters, poor waste management system, air pollution, worsening of green area conditions, and low ecological awareness. City is the process of implementing a large-scale tree planting, expanding the number of new drinking water wells, and improving the waste management system.
- (d) *Small Grants Programme to support LEAPs implementation in pilot cities (2006-2007).* The aim of the Small Grants Programme was to provide funding for projects

ranging from environmental awareness and education initiatives to low-cost, pollution reduction and environmental improvement in each of the LEAPs cities. **Small grants for municipalities** - targeted local governments, encouraging partnership with business and/or NGO. **Small grants for NGOs** - targeted local NGOs, which work mainly in solving local environmental problems. Projects were selected according to priority actions identified in Action Plans of Pilot Cities. The main issues raised within these projects were drinking water supply, irrigation system, waste management, planting of greenery, environmental awareness of citizens etc.

- (e) *Developing of Guideline for LEAPs implementation in South Caucasus (2006)*. Guideline in English and Russian languages as well as training materials on LEAPs methodology on national languages were developed and presented during national trainings for local authorities in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.
- (f) *Conduct an Evaluation of LEAPs in South Caucasus (2006-2007)*. The aim of this project is to develop a comprehensive assessment of LEAP activities in the Caucasus to present at the side event of LEAPs organized by EECCA RECs jointly during the sixth "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference.
- (g) *Replication of LEAPs in three new communities of South Caucasus countries (2007 -2008)*.

IV. LESSONS LEARNED, FUTURE DIRECTIONS, AND ROLE OF EECCA RECS

54. This section identifies lessons learned to date, recommended actions for promoting LEAPs throughout the EECCA region, and a proposed role for RECs in promoting LEAPs in the future.

A. Lessons Learned:

- (a) ***Strong support of civil society is critical to LEAP success:*** The LEAP methodology works only if there is strong, local interest and sound support from the community. A strong civil society is critical to raising environmental awareness and helps assure the long-term sustainability of LEAP implementation in the future. Local NGOs are critical to success. Local NGOs have played vital roles in the success of LEAPs, including targeting different strata of local communities to popularize and promote LEAP ideas, engaging other sectors of the community to participate in the LEAP, organizing trainings and meetings, and ensuring long-term follow-up. Local NGOs have shown themselves to be most reliable partners and active promoters of LEAP ideas. They represent the most concerned parties in the implementation of the completed action plans and in the promotion and dissemination of LEAP ideas in other communities. Working hand-in-hand with the RECs, local NGOs have taken an active part in the initiation and elaboration of LEAPs, have engaged themselves with fundraising, and attracted new partners and resources to help realize LEAP objectives.
- (b) ***Successful implementation of the LEAP depends upon a strong commitment of the local authorities:*** The success of the LEAP pilot cities was significantly enhanced by the strong commitment and participation of local elected officials. One of the challenges in working with local government is that there are frequent changes in the administrative system of the country and this affects the sustainable implementation of the LEAPs, as well as other

strategic environmental documents at the local level. Thus, the process of building capacity of the local public administration should be done on a continuous basis.

- (c) ***Local stakeholder group should become a formal structure of the local government to ensure long-term success:*** The LEAP development process envisions the establishment of Public Advisory Councils who are responsible for monitoring LEAP implementation activities. As noted above, the instability and frequent changes of the local public administration negatively affect the LEAPs and other policies and programs implementation. Ideally, the leader of the LEAP implementation process should be a representative of a local NGO or civil society who strongly co-operates with other environmental stakeholders of the community. Ideally, the NGO is well known in the community and is willing to work for the LEAP implementation.
- (d) ***Successful LEAPs require strong partnerships:*** The most successful LEAPs have forged strong partnerships between the representatives of the local public authorities, local executive authorities of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and the Ministry of Health, NGOs, business community and the representatives of the civil society. It is critical to involve representatives from these different government bodies at the outset of the LEAP – usually at the community kick-off conference, to help ensure their long-term commitment to the project.
- (e) ***Critical to engage active core of individuals to launch the project:*** A small group of committed individuals is critical to successfully launching a LEAP – individuals who can grasp the ideas of a LEAP from the very start and promote them widely. As a rule, representatives of local NGOs should be included in this group of individuals since they often have credibility with the local population. In communities in Central Asia, this often means respecting the traditions of looking to community elders and patriarchs for their guidance.
- (f) ***Business sector and state enterprises need to be more actively engaged:*** The business sector represents the least participatory sector of the community in the LEAP process. Businesses often do not give due consideration to the problems of the environment in spite of the fact that they are often the cause of environmental problems. Thus, it is necessary to find other means and approaches in order to involve the representatives of private sector and state enterprises in decision-making on environmental problems.
- (g) ***Challenge to engage the general public in environmental issues:*** Many LEAP pilot communities had difficult times raising public awareness about environmental issues. Low environmental consciousness of local population is related to the absence of any relevant literature in local language, lack of access to information sources about environmental conditions, and few environmental education programs for children, among other reasons.
- (h) ***Collecting quality environmental data is challenging:*** The quality of environmental data was often one of the biggest challenges to stakeholder groups. This poor quality is due to a number of factors, including the collapse of the previous system of monitoring and control over the environmental conditions, lack of monitoring equipment or reliable equipment, and lack of accurate up-to-date data.

- (i) ***Stakeholder groups need appropriate expertise:*** It is critical that stakeholder groups have individuals with a range of expertise, experience, and knowledge who can assess environmental conditions, identify appropriate solutions, and develop cost estimates for proposed actions. This can be a huge challenge for smaller communities. Otherwise, it is necessary to engage services of qualified consultants and experts.
- (j) ***Building community empowerment takes time and training:*** EECCA RECs conducted trainings and workshops for stakeholder group members that usually incorporated techniques for building teams, practicing group process skills, undertaking role plays, and working in small groups. These techniques were extremely important in helping community members begin to realize their own capabilities and potential. Building trust is a critical outcome of these efforts that requires open communication and a safe environment where individuals feel comfortable expressing their views.
- (k) ***Important to integrate LEAPs into existing planning processes:*** The viability of LEAPs depends on the degree of their integration into present practices of the local development planning (social, economic, environment, health protection and etc). This will help ensure long-term sustainability of priority actions.
- (l) ***Financing requires local contributions:*** External donors – including international financing institutions, favorably view financial support from local and/or national budgets for environmental investments, and thus, are much more likely to provide their support to a project.
- (m) ***NGOs from small communities need extra professional support:*** Due to their relative lack of sophistication, it is important to help bolster NGOs from small and rural communities with the professional skills they need to work effectively with local population and local authorities.

B. Recommended Actions

55. Participants at the international LEAP conference held in Tbilisi in December 2006 identified a range of future activities to strengthen LEAPs throughout EECCA with a goal of wide-scale application of environmental governance principles and achievement of real environmental improvements at the local level. Some of these recommendations, as well as others, include:

- (a) ***Encourage national government to develop LEAP guidelines and/or requirements:*** Several national governments in Central and Eastern Europe require local governments to develop a local environmental action plans with broad stakeholder involvement. This approach could be considered in selected EECCA countries. At a minimum, national governments should work cooperatively with local and regional governments to support the integration of LEAPs into national and regional strategies and territorial development programs.
- (b) For example, in Moldova, completed local environmental action plans contributed to the implementation of the national environmental policy because the local environmental action

plans established the same priorities as those stipulated by the national government. LEAPs should be presented in national environmental policy reports as the best practices of solving local environmental problems through local partnerships.

- (c) In the South Caucasus, National Environmental Action Plans have been developed in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, and the constitutions of all three countries guarantee the rights of citizens to live in healthy environment. Local environment action programs can be considered as a means for citizens to exercise this right.
- (d) **Promote wide spread implementation of LEAPs throughout the region:** The EECCA region has a relatively limited experience to date in implementing a select number of LEAPs in pilot communities. Our experience has found LEAPs to be effective and worthy of implementation on a broad scale throughout the region.
- (e) EECCA RECs are already starting the process of replicating LEAPs in new communities. The REC-Caucasus has started working with three new communities (one each in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia). The REC-Moldova plans to organize seminars and meetings with the participation of the members of the district public administration from all over the country as well as with the members of NGOs and business community to disseminate the experience gathered from Stefan Voda district.
- (f) **Establish extensive cadre of professionals trained in LEAP methodology:** Local governments and citizens need to be trained on how to establish environmental priorities and develop local environmental action plans, how to promote public involvement, how to work effectively in collaborative multi-stakeholder group process, and how to effectively implement priority actions. LEAP trainers and experts are needed to provide this training and expertise.
- (g) **Provide funding for local governments to develop LEAPs and implement actions addressing environmental priorities:** National governments and donors should consider providing co-financing to local governments to help them develop and implement LEAPs.
- (h) **Promote continued exchange of experience:** Local governments, NGOs, and stakeholder group members would benefit from an exchange of experience in LEAPs development and implementation among EECCA countries. Close cooperation among LEAP communities can further international cooperation for the purposes of sharing experience and practical skills of LEAPs implementation between various countries. EECCA RECs propose the formation of a LEAP Cities network as one approach to promoting the exchange of experience among EECCA communities.
- (i) **Encourage trans-boundary cooperation:** EECCA RECs support the establishment of partnerships between NGOs of EECCA countries through implementation of joint trans-boundary projects and programs aimed towards resolution of common environmental problems through the development and implementation of joint local environmental action plans.

- (j) **Disseminate LEAP information:** It is critical to disseminate LEAPs ideas and objectives, raise public awareness, and publish methodological and informational materials in national languages.

C. Role of EECCA Regional Environmental Centers

56. The EECCA RECs were created to assist in solving environmental problems through the promotion of co-operation at both national and regional levels among NGOs, governments, businesses, local communities and other environmental stakeholders. This mandate provided a solid ground for the EECCA RECs to take a leading role in promoting local environmental action programs which focus on encouraging environmental policy reform, implementing practical local actions, and strengthening democratic societies.

57. EECCA RECs have played a valuable role in promoting and implementing LEAPs throughout the region. The EECCA RECs have proven their ability to work with local governments, non-government organizations, and citizens at the local level to promote cross-sectoral cooperation that achieve real environmental improvements and promote environmental governance. EECCA RECs can play important roles working with national governments to develop LEAP guidelines and/or requirements, train professionals in the LEAP methodology, disseminate LEAP information to the general public, promote sharing of experiences among local governments, and manage LEAP pilot projects for trans-boundary and other special situations.

ATTACHMENT: RESOLUTION

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PLANS: EXPERIENCE AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF EECCA RECS

Tbilisi, Georgia

December 7-8, 2006

Participants of International Conference of Regional Environmental Centres of EECCA countries on Local Environmental Action Plans attended by the representatives of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine

Following the fundamental principles of Agenda 21 representing the global action programme for sustainable development adopted at First Global Summit Planet Earth in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Environmental Action Plan for CEU countries, Environmental Strategy for EECCA countries, decisions and declarations of 1995 Ministerial Conference in Sofia, 1998 Aarhus Conference, 2003 Kiev Conference, as well as World Summit Earth and Millennium Development Goals;

Having discussed the achievements, specificities, current problems and future plans of RECs related to implementation of Local Environmental Action Plans and sustainable development in EECCA countries;

Realizing importance of sustainable development and environmental protection issues for safer and wealthier future;

Recognizing necessity of application of the joint efforts and integrated approaches to environmental problems for ensuring satisfaction of basic need and rising living standards of population;

Emphasizing that cooperation in the field of local environmental planning is one of the prerequisites for sustainable development, that participation of the stakeholders in LEAPs development is one of the most effective forms of public participation in environmental decision making witnessing democratic changes in EECCA countries;

Approving aspiration for developing LEAPs – the effective instrument for resolution of the environmental problems at the local levels;

Taking into account that LEAPs activities are to play an important role in promoting dialogue between authorities and civil society

Noting that despite the achievements of LEAPs programme in EECCA countries, there still is a need for broader dissemination and introduction of sustainable development ideas;

Farther taking into account the importance of upcoming Belgrade Conference of Ministers of Environment of UN ECE Region (October, 2007) decisions for sustainable development

Declare the necessity of the following:

- (a) Comprehensively promote introduction of basic goals and objectives of local environmental planning in EECCA countries through coordination of efforts directed towards achievement of mutual understanding and assistance;
- (b) Use accumulated experience of environmental planning for farther promotion of sound environmental activities, improvement of environmental status and rational use of natural resources in EECCA countries;
- (c) Continue cooperation in the fields of environmental protection and sustainable development both, in EECCA countries and at global scale;
- (d) Promote exchange of experience in LEAPs development and implementation between EECCA countries through the close cooperation;
- (e) Promote establishment of partnership between NGOs of EECCA countries through implementation of joint transboundary projects and programmes aiming towards resolution of common environmental problems, creation of local environmental action plans, etc.;
- (f) Support initiatives aiming towards resolution of environmental problems at local and regional levels. Pay special attention to and exert every effort for supporting initiatives of local authorities, as well as of local communities or persons;
- (g) Promote cooperation of local authorities with various stakeholders for the purposes of resolution of environmental problems at the local levels;
- (h) Ensure transparency and accessibility of information on implementation and farther development of LEAPs;
- (i) Enhance cooperation with media for the purposes of farther promoting local environmental planning ideas, raising awareness of local population and involving broad strata of local population in LEAPs development;
- (j) Exert every effort for identifying the respective sources allowing continuing development and implementation of LEAPs in every community;
- (k) Call the governments of EECCA countries for supporting all the stakeholders in their efforts of developing LEAPs for cities, villages and other settlements;
- (l) Establish cooperation and exchange of experience between REC CEU and RECs of EECCA countries. Jointly develop and introduce new LEAPs implementation mechanisms for local authorities;

- (m) Develop and submit to Belgrade Ministerial Conference (2007) joint report of RECs on activities in the field of LEAPs development and implementation in EECCA countries. All the RECs shall ensure timely submission of the respective information and conduct preliminary discussion of Draft Report with all the stakeholders;
- (n) Promote establishment and coordination of EECCA LEAP network, ensure regular conduction of meetings for exchanging experience and coordinating efforts;
- (o) Provide conditions for disseminating LEAPs ideas and objectives, raising public awareness and publishing methodological and informational materials in national languages;
- (p) Farther develop international cooperation at global level for the purposes of sharing experience and practical skills of LEAPs implementation between various countries;
- (q) Support integration of LEAPs into national and regional strategies and territorial development programs.

* * * *

