

DESK/CASE STUDY

Using integrated Approach to Environmental Sustainability to national action plans and strategies for the implement SDGs, including environment and health

The Republic of Georgia

This desk/case study is developed as a background document in preparation for a National workshop to raising awareness and building capacity on the interlinkages of environment and health in the context of 2030 Agenda in Georgia. It pays particular focus on the different national development action plans and strategies of Georgia, and how they relate to, and be aligned to the sustainable development goals (SDGs), in particular to the environmental dimension of the 2030 agenda.

The desk/case study analysis existing environmental policies, how they are intergrated into national strategic plans, highlights lessons learned, and sets out recommendations to strengthen and advance actions towards improving the environmental sustainability at the national level, including its link to health issues.

The information contained in this desk/case study, and the follow-up discussions, recommendations, and lessons learned from the upcoming national workshop is expected to assist and support the efforts of the government of Georgia and stakeholders in the planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting, and review of policies and actions linked to the 2030 agenda, and in particular to support the develop of national portfolios of actions on environment and health as agreed at the Six Ministerial Conference on Environment Health.

This project is kindly supported by the Advisory Assistance Programme (AAP) of the German Federal Environment Ministry Government.

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INTRODUCTION

“The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not everyone's greed,” Mahatma Gandhi said in what is now one of his best-known quotes. It is true, the Earth provides all that we need to live and thrive. However, current pressure from a growing human population, high consumption, decreasing wildlife habitat, greater competition for natural resources and increased unpredictability due to global climate change, has led to the point when either consumption and production patterns are changed or the planet will no longer be able to sustain its growing population and increased needs. What should be taken to avoid ecological bankruptcy?

The international community, scientists, scholars and politicians agreed decades ago that sustainable development has no alternative. Sustainability implies equal consideration of environmental, social and economic aspects whereby total sustainability is achieved through intergrating afore mentioned issues. The need for integration of environmental aspects and policy objectives into sector policies was one of the key messages of the Brundtland report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987:313):“*The ability to choose policy paths that are sustainable requires that the ecological dimensions of policy be considered at the same time as the economic, trade, energy, agricultural, industrial, and other dimensions on the same agendas and in the same national and international institutions. That is the chief institutional challenge of the 1990s.*”

Recognising that the consideration of ecological aspects alongside economic and social dimensions is the “chief institutional challenge of the 1990s”, a number of proposals were put forward. At the recent UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio in 2012, 193 Member States of the United Nations reaffirmed good governance as a foundation for development: democracy, good governance and the rule of law at the national and international levels, as well as an enabling environment, are essential for sustainable development including sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger (General Assembly resolution 66/288).

Despite the fact that the rationale of the sustainable development concept seems straightforward and desirable at a global level, it is more complex and difficult to implement in concrete terms at sectoral levels. While many “win-win” opportunities exist for achieving environmental and sectoral policy objectives together, trade-offs between the objectives of the three dimensions of sustainable development – environmental, economic and social aspects - is inevitable. The main challenge is whether all the three sectors are equally ready to compromise? What should be the relative weights of environmental and other objectives in trade-off situations? Therefore, addressing environmental concerns in an integrated way is complex and challenging, also requires a huge political leadership at the national level, and partnership with sub-regional, regional and international entities.

Recognizing this complex and challenging issue, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has been actively engaged with different partners: governments, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, private sector and others, to build capacities for integrating environmental sustainability into sectoral and intersectoral planning, and sharing good practices and lessons learned with other countries to facilitate integrated implementation of sustainable development at the county level

Therefore, the Republic of Georgia was selected as one of the countries to organize a national workshop to raising awareness and building capacity on the interlinkages of environment and

health in the context of 2030 Agenda and to develop this case study, since the country has showed in recent years the commitment to reconcile short-term development needs with a longer-term view to optimize natural resource management and ensure inclusive, equitable and sustainable social and economic growth is reflected in a number of national development strategies and join work with other international institutions.

Moreover, the Republic of Georgia has been actively engaged in the European environment and health process, the environment for Europe process, and that of the United Nations Environment Assembly in promoting the interlinkages between environment and health, and also education for sustainable development.

The desk study, beyond being the main background document for the national workshop on environment and health, will be used to inform and raise awareness of key Georgian organizations and stakeholders on the relevance of integrated approach and its basic principles, especially with regard to the implementation of 2030 agenda for sustainable development goals. Therefore, the case study is designed to:

- Identify key optimum conditions for effective use of an integrated approach to generating public policy, (this can be used in the workshop to be organized in the future).
- Collect lessons learned in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs with this approach, so that they might help with its replication in either Georgia or other countries and regions.
- Identify potential bottlenecks, obstacles and challenges for implementing an integrated approach.
- Propose options/recommendations on how to establish a culture of integrated approach in development planning in order to make it a regular practice in elaborating and implementing plans, projects and programs.
- Define the necessary requirements for the effective involvement of different stakeholders, structures and strategic partners in support of the policy action.
- Identify existing points in common and key work lines and stakeholders to be involved in the future for the purpose of making headway in integrating the economic, social and environmental pillars for the country's sustainable development.

The desk/case study is expected to strengthen and advance actions towards improving the environmental sustainability at the national level, including environment and health issues at the national level.

BACKGROUND

By the adoption of the new Constitution in 1995, Georgia committed itself to promote the principles of sustainable development and enhance capacity to implement jointly agreed priorities, in compliance with international and European norms and principles. Article 37 of the Constitution of Georgia states: *“Everyone shall have the right to live in a healthy environment and enjoy natural and cultural surroundings”*. It also provides legal foundation for sustainable development and says: *“Taking into account the interests of current and future generations, the State shall guarantee environmental protection and rational use of nature in order to ensure a safe environment for human health and maintain sustainable development of the country in line with the ecological and economic interests of society”*.

However, the years preceding the formation of an independent, market-based economic system were rather challenging for Georgia in terms of civil unrest, armed conflicts, energy and transport blockades, high crime rates, severed economic ties, the loss of traditional markets and suppliers and the absence of new connections and high rates of workforce migration. These negative factors led to unprecedented economic stagnation, hyperinflation and an increase in unemployment during the first few years of Georgia’s independence.

The country had no choice but to carry out swift and radical economic reforms, the gradual implementation of which significantly improved the situation, but failed to yield desired results, especially in terms of integrating social, economic and environmental dimensions in an equitable way.

Georgia is a lower-middle income country with a GDP of 3852.5 USD per capita (GeoStat, 2016) and ranked 70th on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2016). The main sectors of the country’s economy are trade, industry, public administration, transport and communication, agriculture, construction and tourism. Over the past years, Georgia has achieved remarkable growth rates. The government developed and introduced a wide range of changes in all sectors, including economic reforms. Most of these reforms were addressed to create attractive business environment with the aim of attracting foreign investments, facilitate private sector development, stimulate entrepreneurial activities in various fields of economy and increase employment opportunities.

Principles of economic freedom and policies that actively encourage further commercialization and growth have always been promoted in the country. At the same time strengthening integrated approach system and ensuring that environmental issues are further integrated across development strategies, plans and frameworks, gradually is evolving as one of the declared priorities of the government. However, national leadership needs to be backed up by concrete actions, dedicated capacities, enabling legislation and necessary resources. An example demonstrating the political willingness of the government towards the promotion of the Integrated approach is the preparation of the new draft law on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) which includes provisions on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Introduction of SEA as a legally binding tool for the assessment of special sectoral programmes/plans prior to their approval with the purpose to streamline environmental and health related aspects in various sectoral development strategic documents, will promote integration approach at the national level.

Georgia is a party to more than 30 Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA)¹. Most of the MEAs that Georgia is a Party to have been mainstreamed into development policies and planning. Various plans and programmes aiming at implementation of the MEAs are briefly described below.

The signing of the Association Agreement (AA) with the European Union in June 2014 and the coming into effect of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) from September 2014 are landmark achievements for Georgia. The Government of Georgia intends to adhere to democratic development course and ensure firm support to universal European values, which will be the basis for getting closer to the EU. effective implementation of the Association Agreement is a vital component as it is a precondition for political association and gradual economic integration with the EU.

¹ According to Georgian legislation, the requirements provided by international agreements are hierarchically higher than the ones provided by national legislation (except for the Constitution).

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY IN GEORGIA

During the last decades, environmental policies have been shaped by a number of policy documents developed in the field of environment as well as other sectoral development strategies/action plans. Some of them are already approved, while others are under preparation. Most environmental issues are complex and closely interlinked with different economic sectors. Multilateral Environmental Agreements, well-established international principles and at the moment the AA creates the basis for the national policy papers and plans. The aspiration of the Sustainable Development Goals and its targets is also well demonstrated in a number of strategic documents of Georgia.

Next subchapter will review the main strategic documents determining environmental policy in Georgia and their relevance to the SDGs.

Environmental Policy Documents

National Environmental Action Programme (NEAP)

The preparation of the 5 year National Environmental Action Programmes is required by the Law on Environment Protection of Georgia (1996) aiming at introducing environmental planning at national level. NEAP provides the basic policy framework for demand-driven environmental planning process, favourable to sustainable development. The First National Environmental Action Programme (NEAP-1) of Georgia was approved in 2000 by the decree of the President of Georgia. It was the first attempt towards providing an officially adopted 5-year action plan for environmental protection.

The second National Environmental Action Programme (NEAP-2) for 2012-2016 presents a call for sustainable development where economic growth, environmental protection and social development are balanced. Long-term goals, short-term targets and activities are presented for eleven selected priority themes². In addition to the purely environmental themes, several cross-cutting issues, such as environmental impact assessment and permitting, enforcement, environmental education and public awareness, monitoring, the scientific basis for decision-making and the need for geographic information systems are also set forth. Each thematic chapter clarifies the environmental problems/ causes encountered by, the stakeholders, national and international developments and an assessment of the necessary regulatory framework. It also contains table of activities with clear distribution of the responsibilities, implementation timeframes and estimated costs.

The NEAP-2 adopted by the Cabinet of Ministers of Georgia entails strong partnership and shared responsibility among all economic entities which creates a strong basis for the implementation of the envisaged activities.

NEAP-2 is a good illustration of the intersectoral nature of the environmental concerns. Need for vertical and horizontal cooperation among sectoral institutions and among various actors ensuring the implementation of the actions is also well demonstrated in the document as it concludes with a strong declaration on the importance of policy coordination within the national government and between the national and the municipal levels. However, there are no

² Priority themes defined are as follows: Water resources; Ambient air; Waste and chemicals; Black Sea; Biodiversity and protected areas; Forestry; Land resources; Mineral resources and groundwater; Disasters; Nuclear and radiation safety; Climate Change

clear monitoring mechanisms on the implementation of the NEAP approved by all stakeholders and concerned Ministries. Mid-term review on the implementation of the NEAP-2 initiated and conducted by the Ministry of Environment of Georgia in 2015 revealed that 23% of activities have already been realized, 59% are under implementation, 16% have not been started yet and 1% has been cancelled. The assessment covered activities/projects implemented by the Ministry of Environment as well as other Ministries and stakeholders. *Although the NEAP was developed before the defining the SDGs its objectives and targets are well suited with the SDGs 1, 2, 3, 6,7, 13, 14, 15, 16 17.*

National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)

The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) of Georgia (2014–2020) is the most important national strategic and planning document in the field of biodiversity aiming, in general to ensure permanent provision of ecosystem services and therefore contributing to the sustainable development of the country. As NBSAP is the main policy document for this decade, it is vital to achieve targets and activities defined in it, NBSAP could also be considered as the main strategic plan for the system of protected areas.

Georgia's first NBSAP (NBSAP-1) was approved in 2005. There were some significant achievements in the implementation, e.g. development of the system of protected areas, preparation of the National Red List of Georgia based on international criteria and categories, development of conservation management plans for endangered species and groups of species, initiation of the national biodiversity monitoring system, ex-situ and/or on-farm conservation of several endemic and endangered plant species and crops and improvement of the legal and institutional environment for the sustainable management of biological resources., however many of the activities have not been accomplished, Thus, an important purpose of NBSAP-2 is to fill this implementation gap.

The Strategy argues that economic prosperity and alleviation of poverty cannot be achieved in the long run if the natural capital is lost. That is why it calls to bridge the gap between economic development interests and biodiversity conservation needs. UNEP supported project on "The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB)" is a good example for addressing economic development and biodiversity conservation (this initiative is discussed in details in the next chapter).

It is expected that by 2020, biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and ecosystems' values will be integrated into development programs for such sectors as forestry, energy, agriculture, tourism, mining and infrastructure. There will be mechanisms to ensure that infrastructure development and other activities that could have a significant impact on biodiversity are subjected to the EIA; Also adequate and fair compensation mechanisms where damage to biodiversity is unavoidable, will be implemented.

The strategy pays significant attention to the economic values of Georgia's agricultural ecosystems and natural grasslands and promotes organic farming and sustainable management practices.

The document reflects the CBD Convention's Strategic Plan and the Aichi Targets. Although the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection is responsible for the overall coordination of the implementation of NBSAP, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Finance as well as municipalities and various scientific institutions are defined as important partners. A wide spectrum of nongovernmental and scientific organizations were involved in the NBSAP

preparation process. Recently a Committee for the supervision and monitoring of NBSAP implementation was established. The members of the Committee are the Deputy Ministers of Agriculture, Energy, Science and Education, Economy and Sustainable Development and Finance. *The Strategy meets SDGs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17.*

Second National Action Programme to Combat Desertification 2014-2022

Second National Action Programme to Combat Desertification (2014-2022) was approved in 2014. Georgia has been a party to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification (UNCCD) since 1999. Georgia's First National Action Programme was adopted in 2003 but could not be implemented due to a lack of funding.

Policy framework of the Second Programme implies a formation of a favorable legal and institutional environment for making decisions to combat desertification/land degradation and minimize the negative effects of drought. The operational objectives of the programme have been formed in accordance with the operational objectives of the 10 year strategy objectives of the Convention as well as National Environmental Action Programme (NEAP) and National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.

Soil erosion is the critical threat to Georgian soils. Nearly 35 per cent of agricultural land is degraded as a result of water and wind erosion, which particularly affects the mountainous areas and crop fields, especially in eastern Georgia. According to the Programme wind erosion and desertification have become a critical issue in eastern Georgia due to overgrazing and the recent decline in rainfall in the region. Therefore, desertification problem is very closely interrelated with the agricultural sustainability, which on its side determines not only the welfare of rural population but also overall food security and economic growth of the country. The Programme is being implemented under the overall coordination of the Ministry of Environment in partnership with the Ministries of Agriculture, Regional Development and Infrastructure, Economy and Sustainable Development, Education and Science. Furthermore, local authorities and science-research institutions are closely involved in the implementation process. *Numerous activities defined by the Programme meet SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 13, 15.*

EU-Georgia Association Agreement (AA) and Road Maps

EU-Georgia Association Agreement was ratified by the Parliament of Georgia in 2014 and it entered into force from September of the same year. Given the political interest to the implementation of the AA, it likely will be a strategic document leading the political agenda of the country within the next 10-15 years. Its environmental chapters are extensive and cover a number of environmental sectors. Due to the crosscutting nature of environmental issues, its implementation will require joint efforts from different state institutions.

With the purpose to implement the environmental chapters of the AA, nine sector-specific road maps³ have been developed in 2015 in the fields of environment and climate action by the Ministry of Environment of Georgia. The roadmaps activities enabling the country to implement legal approximation, policy making and similar activities in line with the specific

³ The road maps were developed for the following areas: (1)Environmental governance; (2)Air quality protection; (3)Water quality and water resources management (including marine environment but excluding drinking water); (4)Waste management; (5)Nature protection (including GMO, species trading and fisheries policy); (6)Industrial pollution and industrial hazards; (7)Chemicals management; (8)Climate Action (including Ozone Depleting Substances - ODS); (9)Forestry.

requirements of the environment and climate action chapters. Ministries of Agriculture, Economy, Health, Regional Development and Infrastructure are other main ministries responsible for the implementation of the environmental chapters of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement. The overall coordination for implementing AA is done by the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration while DCFTA related issues have been covered by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. All concerned Ministries report quarterly on the progress of the AA implementation to the State Minister's Office.

Roadmaps are not officially approved as this is a live document and may be updated at any time considering timeframes defined by the AA. *Activities identified under the Roadmaps meet SDGs 1, 3, 6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17.*

Forestry Policy Paper

One more important document, which was prepared and approved in 2013 by the Parliament of Georgia, is the National Forestry Policy Paper. The document defines main principles of forest management in Georgia and sets strategic priorities. The necessity of integration of forestry policy into other sector policies, like agriculture and energy sectors, is emphasized in the document.

Forestry Policy is considered as an integral part of the country's sustainable development policy and it is in line with the main principles of the Oslo Ministerial Decision: European Forests 2020 (2011). The policy paper provides linkages of forest ecosystems with poverty, climate change, biodiversity, etc.

National Forestry Policy document created a basis for the Forestry National Programme, which is being prepared under the auspices of the Ministry of Environment. The preparation process involves more than 80 members representing various ministries and agencies, scientific, non-governmental and relevant international organizations, who work in groups of about 6-8 people on different aspects of forest management.

Given the complicated nature and sensitivity of forestry sector, such participatory approach to the forest reforms is critical and is expected to deliver well-thought strategic documents with high acceptance by all main stakeholders. *The policy paper meets SDGs 1, 6, 8, 12, 13, 15.*

Low Emission Development Strategy (LEDS) and Sustainable Energy Action Plans (SEAPs)

Development of the Low Emission Development Strategy (LEDS) started in 2013 as an inter-ministerial process coordinated by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection and is expected to be finalized in 2016. Inter-ministerial commission is working on development of the Low Emissions Strategies in **industry, transport, agriculture, forestry and waste** sectors. The final LEDS and the mitigation actions specified therein will become the key instrument in achieving Georgia's GHG emission reduction target.

Furthermore, seven cities and municipalities of Georgia - Tbilisi, Rustavi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Gori, Poti and Zugdidi, have signed the Covenant of Mayors aiming at enhancing GHG emission reduction process in urban areas that are the major sources of the emissions. (These are the seven biggest cities of Georgia representing about 45 per cent of the population) The Initiative implies elaboration and implementation of **Sustainable Energy Action Plans (SEAP)** aiming at reducing GHG emissions by 2020, from residential and transport sectors by at least 20% from the base year emissions..

With acceding Copenhagen Accord in 2010 Georgia takes steps “to achieve a measurable, reportable and verifiable deviation from the baseline scenario (below “business as usual” levels) supported and enabled by finance, technology and capacity-building”.

Georgia plans to unconditionally reduce its GHG emissions by 15% below the business as usual scenario (BAU) for the year 2030. This is equal to reduction in emission intensity per unit of GDP by approximately 34% from 2013 to 2030.

Low emission development on the local level in combination with the Low Emission Development Strategy (LEDS) will ensure benefits and synergies for all. **LEADS and SEAPs meet SDGs 1, 2, 7, 9, 11, 13, 17.**

National Waste Management Strategy and Action Plan (AP)

National Waste Management Strategy (NWMS) and National Waste Management Action Plan (AP) are two documents which are required to be developed by the recently adopted Waste Code (2014). The documents are under development and must be approved by the end of 2015.

Draft NWMS sets specific objectives and targets, while the AP will include specific activities indicating the responsible institutions and timeframes for the implementation. Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection is a policy making body in waste management sector, while the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure is in charge of closing/constructing/operating landfills. Other ministries are responsible for managing the specific waste streams (healthcare waste, animal waste), while enforcement is shared by the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Internal Affairs and municipalities. Besides, municipalities are key players in the waste management.

The documents demonstrate the necessity of integrated approach to waste management. One of the principles, introduced by the Code, is an Extended Producer Responsibility, an environmental policy approach, obliging private sector to prevent and take care of the waste generated through the whole production cycle. Application of this principle will require development of partnership with the private sector. **The Strategy meets SDGs 3, 6, 11, 12.**

National Plan of Action for Capacity Development in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

DRR is a field that requires a high degree of coordination, integration of policies, actions and efforts. Due to the complicated landscape and unique geographical conditions, natural hazards (floods, flash floods, landslides, mudflows, snow avalanches, earthquakes, hail, heavy rains, storm winds, and droughts) in Georgia are characterized by high magnitude, frequency and risk level, substantially affecting the national economy with damage to human health, infrastructure and environment. Over the last 40 years 70% of the territory of the country experienced natural hazards and economic losses exceeded USD 14 billion.

There is a strong willingness of the government for strengthening the national DRR system and ensuring that disaster risk reduction issues are adequately integrated across development policies by concrete actions, through dedicated capacities, an enabling legislation and necessary resources aimed at reducing existing risks, avoiding new risks, and improving preparedness for efficient response to disasters. To this end, in 2013 the Georgian government approached the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI), an inter-agency partnership comprising UNDP, UNOCHA, UNICEF, WFP, FAO and WHO, to provide it with support in capacity development for disaster risk reduction, including preparedness for emergency response.

“**DRR Capacity Report Georgia 2014**” revealed that in Georgia many sectoral policies, programmes and projects indirectly contribute to reducing underlying risk factors and building community resilience in the areas of environmental protection, climate change, and natural resource management. However, disaster risk reduction is not explicitly integrated or referenced in sectoral policies or programmes, and only a number of localized projects specifically target disaster risk reduction. Furthermore, traditional approaches remain focused on emergency response rather than prevention and preparedness.

Based on recommendations proposed by the report a five year **National Plan of Action for Capacity Development in Disaster Risk Reduction has been developed**, which is expected to be approved officially. The National Plan provides a logical framework structured according to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) priorities and provides a basis for aligning existing and planned projects, programmes and initiatives carried out by various stakeholders in Georgia into a single comprehensive framework owned by the Government of Georgia.

The security and Crisis Management council under the Prime-Minister’s office has taken the lead in the coordination of the implementation of the plan. *The National Plan meets SDGs 1, 11, 13, 17.*

Other Efforts towards Integrated Approach

In addition to the above described strategic documents which have already been approved or are under the preparation and are expected to be approved officially, the efforts of the government are laid out in other documents, which are not mandatory for implementation, but provide clear picture and guidance towards the need of introducing the integrated approach.

Two documents described below serve as good examples towards integrated approach

Environmental Performance Review (EPR)

Environmental Performance Review (EPR) is an assessment of the progress a country has made towards reconciling its environmental and economic targets and whilst meeting its international environmental commitments. Though it is not mandatory, the Georgian government with the support from UNECE applied this instrument twice (2003, 2010) and received comprehensive assessment about the progress and challenges of the environmental governance in the country.

The third-cycle Environmental Performance Review is being carried out in Georgia at the request of the Ministry of Environment in 2014. EPR team was requested not only to evaluate a country’s efforts to reduce its overall pollution burden and manage its natural resources, but also to examine how the environmental issues are integrated in other sectors and socio-economic policies and strategies of the country.

To this end the government of Georgia has selected chapters in an unprecedentedly cross-cutting way (among others, selected chapters will cover the detailed assessment of pressure of energy, industry, agriculture, tourism and transport sectors on the environment). Although there is no separate chapter on environment and health, health related aspects are broadly addressed

in the document. Inter-ministerial Commission comprised of different governmental agencies' representatives⁴, has been working with the EPR experts.

The third review, launched in 2016, covered policy-making, implementation and the financing of environmental policies and projects. It discussed also issues on air protection, water management, including protection of the Black Sea, waste management, biodiversity, forests and protected areas, energy, industry, agriculture, transport, forestry, tourism, health and risk management of natural and technological/anthropogenic hazards. The review made valuable suggestions for strengthening efforts towards a comprehensive and systemic response to sustainable development challenges.

The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB)

UNEP's initiative "The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB)" brings the multiple values, including the non-monetary values, of the globe's ecosystems and their services from the invisible into the visible spectrum of economic and developmental discourse.

Acknowledging the value of biodiversity and its potential for creating incentives for conservation and sustainable use, Georgia volunteered to be a pilot country for a scoping valuation study of ecosystems and biodiversity which was implemented by UNEP under the TEEB initiative in 2013. The TEEB Georgia Scoping Study identified five core sectors of the Georgian economy of high importance for future management of biodiversity: **energy, tourism, agriculture, mining and forestry**. The study showed the critical importance of healthy ecosystems to the functioning of these important economic sectors. The analyses also highlight that if business as usual is not changed, the sustainability of these sectors are questionable.

The scoping study is expected to be followed by a full TEEB national study to ensure the sustainability of the country's commitment to demonstrate a strong relationship between the economy and environment, and the integration of the value of natural capital into national economic policies.

⁴ Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Science and Education, Ministry of Energy Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure

Integration of Environmental Aspects into the National Strategic Plans of Georgia

The government of Georgia recognizes that integrating environment and good governance components in other sectors of development is a good way to achieve coordination and convergence, as well as a way to combat poverty and a long-term strategy to address health concerns. To achieve the coherency of strategic approaches on the national level the process of developing the new policy document is preceded by the overview of already existing plans and programmes. This practice ensures the consistency and proper linkages among the various sectoral developments.

Analysis on the extent to which the environmental issues are reflected in the strategic documents of GEORGIA and the extent to which they reflect the Sustainable Development Goals will be expounded in the next sub chapters.

Social-economic Development Strategy of Georgia “Georgia 2020”

The recently adopted Social-Economic Development Strategy of Georgia “Georgia 2020” defines key priorities and strategic directions for achieving long-term, sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Economic policy of the Government is based on three main principles. The **first principle** implies ensuring fast and efficient economic growth with the aim to raise employment and the overall living standards of the population. The **second principle** implies universal involvement of the population in the economic development process (including Diasporas, migrants, ethnic minorities and other groups). The **third principle** is based on rational use of natural resources, ensuring environmental safety and sustainability and avoiding natural disasters during the process of economic development.

For achieving long-term, sustainable and inclusive economic growth the Strategy reflects the Sustainable Goals, particularly by promoting green economy, sustainable forest management principles, environmentally-friendly modern technologies, human capital development; applying policy instruments for avoiding negative impact of the infrastructural projects, ensuring quality and accessible health care, education and basic social welfare systems, streamlining water supply and drainage systems etc. *The Strategy addresses Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 16 and 17.)*

However, the level of integration of environmental goals into the Strategy is still limited. Environmental issues are mostly discussed in relation to infrastructure development. despite the fact that land degradation and desertification process represents significant social, economic and ecological problems for Georgia., in spite of the fact that the Second National Action Programme to Combat Desertification 2014-2022 states that 35 per cent of agricultural land is degraded, the Social-economic Development Strategy of Georgia does not address land degradation issues at any level. the climate change mitigation and adaptation issues are only mentioned in terms of potential source of international funding.

The **Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia** undertakes the responsibility for implementation of “Georgia 2020”.

Regional Development Programme

The “Regional Development Programme of Georgia 2015-2017” is a medium-term governmental document specifying the main goals and objectives of Georgia’s regional development policy and its relevant priorities and measures. The Programme addresses social-

economic issues and defines the necessary conditions aimed at achieving sustainable development and social cohesion of the country's regions.

The document covers wide range of environmental challenges associated with air quality, sanitation and sewerage system, waste management, polluted old industrial sites, disaster risk reduction and forestry sector development. The document emphasizes on the improvement of infrastructure services, establishment of early warning, monitoring and forecast systems at the regional and local levels. The document does not mention any challenges regarding desertification, erosion or climate change adaptation issues even though these aspects are crucial for rural development and are considered as critical in other strategic documents.

In order to support effective implementation of the Programme, detailed measurable variables and monitoring plan are developed specifying each measure to be implemented by relevant line Ministries⁵. Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure is responsible for the overall implementation of the Strategy. *The Programme meets SDGs 6, 9.*

Strategy for Agricultural Development in Georgia 2015-2020

The main goals of the “**Strategy for Agricultural Development in Georgia 2015-2020**” are creation of favorable conditions for increasing competitiveness in agro food sector, promotion of stable growth of high quality agricultural production, ensuring food safety and security and elimination of rural poverty.

Endowed with a rich natural abundance of fertile soil, clean water and favourable climate, Georgia's agricultural industry plays a key role in the country's economy. During the Soviet era, Georgia's exports of agricultural products exceeded imports by 70 per cent. With the breakdown of the Soviet Union and loss of traditional markets, the agricultural industry collapsed and the area of cultivated agricultural land fell by almost half. presently agriculture's contribution to GDP is 9.2 per cent (Geo Stat2014).

High industrialization of agriculture during the Soviet planned economy followed by spontaneous and chaotic development of the sector in the 90s, resulted in the degradation of agricultural ecosystems and the reduction of local plant and animal genetic resources. Since the 2000s, significant initiatives have been implemented aiming to improve the conservation status of the agricultural biodiversity of Georgia, however the efforts were not sufficient to stop the process of increased degradation and genetic erosion of the agricultural biodiversity and the degradation of the natural grasslands of Georgia.

Given the abovementioned challenges in the field, the importance of the agricultural Strategy is very high. The strategy recognizes the links between the richness of the natural environment and farming practices, promotes integration of environmental concerns into the agricultural policy and discusses the application of specific measures to reduce risks of environmental degradation and enhance the sustainability of agro-ecosystems, particularly by reconstruction of the wind breaks and carrying out measures against soil degradation.

Productive and sustainable farming methods which aims at providing secure and safe agricultural production will be encouraged by ensuring best agricultural practices including crop rotation (for soil structure and quality improvement) and promoting low level or

⁵ Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Justice, Georgian National Tourism Administration, Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, all municipalities of Georgia

appropriate chemical applications. The Strategy also states that significant attention will be given to the climate change issues and its impact on soil degradation and desertification processes.

However, while NBSAP pays significant attention to the crops cultivated in Georgia since ancient times as the highest conservation importance and argues that these species are increasingly at risk due to habitat loss, fragmentation, overgrazing, desertification and potential genetic erosion and contamination by genetically modified organisms, the Strategy of Agricultural Development does not emphasize questions related to the GMO and development of organic agriculture, which is an important issue for the green economy. NBSAP discusses ways of conserving endemic agricultural species and landraces while Agricultural Strategy is more focused on activities aimed at developing soil protection and land-reclamation infrastructure. *The Strategy meets SDGs 1, 2, 5, 13, 15, 17.*

National Environment and Health Action Plan (NEHAP)

National Environmental Health Action Plan (NEHAP) is an instrument for comprehensive, holistic and intersectoral way of planning and implementing environmental health action at the national level. The first NEHAP of Georgia was developed in 2003 but was never adopted.

The Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia launched the development of the **Second National Environment and Health Plan for Georgia** which aims at identifying, strengthening and promoting strong environmental and sustainable development policies in order to reduce population's exposure to environmental pollution. Multisectoral Working Group was established under the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs.

National Strategy and Action Plan on Environmental Education for Sustainable Development 2012–2014

National Strategy and Action Plan seeks to lay the foundations for ESD in Georgia. While giving due attention to the Georgian context, the strategy and action plan are aligned with the vision and goals of the DESD (Decade of Education for Sustainable Development) and the UNECE ESD strategy and action plan. In recent years the Georgian Government has strengthened its efforts to promote better environmental education. Several important initiatives have been implemented. In 2012 a national Environmental Education Week and the international Tbilisi+35 Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education for Sustainable Development was organized in partnership with UNESCO and UNEP.

Implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan was carried out by the Ministry of Environment with extensive and close cooperation with the Ministry of Education. The following activities have been implemented under the strategy: establishment of Environmental Information and Education Centre under the Ministry of Environment in 2013 (the Center was established on the basis of the Aarhus Center with increased staff and functions); incorporation of Environmental Education issues into the national educational materials and preschool development standards; Environmental Education will be incorporated into vocational education curricula and materials from 2016.

“Working Group on Environmental Education” comprised of governmental, nongovernmental and scientific institutions has been established for coordinating formal and informal environmental education initiatives in Georgia.

The e Global Action Programme (GAP) for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) adopted in Aichi-Nagoya in November 2014 should play a major role in advancing environmental education and education for sustainable development in Georgia. The five priorities of the GAP: advancing policy, transforming learning and training environments, building capacities of educators and trainers, empowering and mobilizing youth, and accelerating sustainable solutions at local level – should effectively be used considering the high interest of the Georgian Government in ESD. *The Strategy meets SDGs 1, 4, 8, 12, 13*

Energy Strategy of Georgia for 2015-2030

The Ministry of Energy of Georgia is developing “**Energy Strategy of Georgia for 2015-2030**”. The vision of the strategy is achieving energy security, meeting the long-term need for clean and affordable energy and ensuring social and environmental protection.

The main energy sources in Georgia are natural gas, petroleum products, hydropower and biomass for residential heating. Georgia's energy sector has experienced significant growth in

recent years, from having annual electricity generation of 7,061 GWh in 2005 to reaching 10,059 GWh in 2013; it became a net exporter of electricity in 2007. Since 2006, electricity production from HPPs has increased by almost 40 per cent.

With more than 26,000 rivers, hydropower dominates Georgia's electricity generation sector. While hydropower is a renewable resource, it depends on and impacts upon ecosystem services. Some of the impacts of the hydropower sector include changing river environment, habitat loss and displacement of local communities. Dams have cumulative impacts on local climate, water quality, natural flooding and species composition. In addition, nearly half of the Georgian population lives in rural areas and fully dependent on ecosystem services such as water purification, erosion prevention and fuel wood provisioning. Any reduction in the provisioning of these services may result in adverse impact on social welfare.

In the absence of a national energy strategy and strategic site allocation policy, serving as a long-term vision for the energy sector, HPP sites are selected on a case-by-case basis without taking into consideration the best international practices of site selection criteria, focusing on the benefits and costs of each site, rather than an optimal development framework.

Since the need to integrate energy and environmental policy goals is obvious, development of the national Energy Policy and Strategy is very important and the document is expected to make such integration realistic and meaningful.

National Human Rights Strategy

The National Human Rights Strategy of Georgia covers the period from 2014 through 2020. The Strategy recognizes the link and interrelationship between the environment and human rights and incorporates a right to a safe, healthy and ecologically-balanced environment as one of the core human rights.

Human Rights Action Plan which has been built upon the National Human Rights Strategy was developed by the Inter-Agency Commission comprised of representatives of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, as well as non-governmental and international organizations. The Action Plan describes in detail particular tasks to be implemented by relevant governmental structures in the next two years. Among the tasks are: a)strengthening national legislation and improving state mechanisms guarantying greater access to environmental information, b)greater transparency and public involvement in decision-making process, c)ensuring access to justice in environmental matters and e)harmonizing national legislation with current international legal norms and criteria on environmental issues generally raising public awareness on environmental human rights and protection. *Human Rights Strategy meets SDGs 16 and 17.*

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Establishing inter-Ministerial Working Groups/Commissions comprising of governmental officials from different state authorities for the development of strategic documents is an established practice in Georgia. There have been the positive as well as more challenging examples of inter-ministerial cooperation in Georgia. The national policy dialogue on water resources management provides a good example of how various stakeholders can be involved in a results-oriented and evidence-based policymaking and law-making process. A similar approach is being applied to design the key elements of the forestry policy reform. The inter-ministerial commission responsible for developing a state programme for air pollution reduction could be considered less successful as representatives from the economic sector ministries did not support measures directed to the reduction of air pollution. The transport sector and the Ministry of Environment lacked strong scientific prove on the linkages between the impact of transport emissions on the environment and human health in the big cities of Georgia.

In all three cases the Ministry of Environment was in the leading position to coordinate the work of inter-ministerial working groups/commissions.

Practice shows that the engagement of high-ranking officials in such groups are effective in terms of supporting the policy document at decision-making stage; however, practice also proves that they are too busy with other commitments and cannot afford extensive participation in the working groups while mid-level officials are more available but have less power to make decisions. Also, smaller groups are more effective than large and involvement of all concerned institutions from the very beginning is very important.

One of the key factors for ensuring balanced policy documents is acceptance of all sectors equally. Practice shows that sometimes economic sector representatives have more power in the working groups. This skewed balance is even more aggravated by the fact that the understanding of environmental issues still lacks among different governmental institutions. The knowledge of approaches to environmental mainstreaming is limited to a small group of decision makers. Interviews with the representatives from the Ministry of Environment, research institutes and NGOs revealed that apart from those working for environmental organizations, sustainable approaches are considered as a luxury for developed countries and rather early for the young democracy of Georgia. Strong supporters of liberal economy consider the environment in terms of the natural capital available for wealth creation. Some Georgian politicians believe that Georgia should go the same way as developed countries – first fast economic growth, then high standards of environmental protection.

There is no capacity at national level to apply such modern techniques as for example, cost-benefit analysis (CBA) and statistical analysis. The best way to influence “non-environmentalist” decision makers is to strengthen and make more visible links between environment and wellbeing. Above mentioned tools could provide strong arguments signifying the causes and impacts of unsustainable approach and therefore, promoting environmental priorities in designing and implementing strategic documents. TEEB has been an excellent example for demonstrating the economic value of “spiritual and aesthetic” nature that apparently feeds forty per cent of the world’s economy.

The implementation of the national strategies/plans is a complex issue and needs a strong and efficient system of coordination including programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, financial management and control. Monitoring mechanisms exists for most

strategic papers. However, it is too early to judge about their effectiveness especially for those documents which have been approved recently.

Strategic documents in Georgia are often developed by the international consultants due to the lack of capacities and effective institutions. It is vital for the governmental officials to have the full ownership of the whole process of preparation as well as final documents. Twinning mechanism, provided by the EU, can serve as a good example for ensuring preparation of documents jointly.

Recommendations for national authorities: Involve all relevant stakeholders at the early stage of developing the strategic document; Establish official working groups comprising of high-ranking and mid-level officials, as well as NGO representatives; Make regular meetings with the mid-level officials, while inviting high ranking officials periodically to update and agree on conceptual aspects; Encourage broader involvement of “non-environmentalists” in the environmental processes, with the purpose to demonstrate linkages between the various sectors clearly. Promote introduction of modern methods, like CBA, statistical analysis, etc. translating into and/or connecting environmental concerns with long-term economic aspects.

Recommendations for UNEP: Promote the participation of the representatives of sectoral ministries in the international environmental processes with the purpose to broaden their understanding on global environmental concerns and well-experienced international approaches; Intensify cooperation with relevant sector state authorities and stimulate their involvement in UNEP supported initiatives conducted at national/regional level.

Weakened scientific institutions and weakened links between the research results and decisions making, is an important policy gap seriously hampering the effective decision making. Lack of professionals in the sector caused by the low demand for environmental specialists is still a challenge. Despite the strengthened mandate of governmental actors involved in environmental management, the mechanism of comprehensive horizontal cooperation, especially with the scientific institutions remains weak.

Recommendations for national authorities: Strengthen cooperation with the scientific institutions and promote demand driven researches.

It is vital to establish a culture of integrated approach in development planning. Changing values, interests and actions are necessary to make integrated approach a regular practice in elaborating and implementing plans, projects and programs. Making thoughtful decisions and ensuring the continuity of actions and policies are also crucial for achieving the set goals. Pressure on every new government in Georgia to take ad hoc measures to combat economic challenges and unemployment in the short term, hinders more active actions towards green economy and sustainable development. Therefore, until investment in environmental sector is not considered as a means of avoiding future high costs resulting from degraded ecosystems, culture of integrated approach cannot be considered as achieved. The profound understanding and consistency in measures taken by the governmental agencies is key in achieving the sustainability on the national level.

Professionalism and implementation of permanent measures towards strengthening capacities at all levels is critical to overcome the above mentioned challenges. Some institutional capacity building initiatives from the government has been observed during the recent period. Specifically, Environmental Information and Education Centre established under the Ministry of Environment in 2013 is responsible for providing training and capacity building activities and more generally, ensuring access to available environmental information through electronic databases. In May 2014, a training concept in support of local self-governments was approved

by the Government. Along with the mandatory allocation of 1 per cent of the municipal salary fund for training, this creates a good basis for establishing an institutionalized training system for local authorities under the umbrella of the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure and its Centre for Effective Governance System and Territorial Arrangement Reform. These initiatives are not enough and more efforts both at policy making and implementation stages are needed.

Recommendations for national authorities: Develop and implement capacity building programmes for all levels of decision-makers with a special focus on key mid-level managers; Strengthen formal and informal education and promote greater accountability to the public; Strengthen the role of society and increase interest and exposure by mass-media on the environmental issues; Strengthen cooperation with the international community and permanently share experience.

Recommendations for UNEP: Support the capacity building activities at national/regional level; Disseminate the UNEP's scientific studies/analysis among the various stakeholders; prepare a series of sectoral and thematic briefs, short fact-sheets illustrating close linkages between the science and effective decision making for decision-makers; Assist countries in building trust, understanding and creating common working culture among different sectors with the purpose to gain support and advance environment sustainability from other sectors.

The practice proves that involvement of international community and well-experienced international organizations contributes a lot to the formulation of understanding and the ways of thinking for decision-makers which TEEB can serve as a good example. Declared commitments by the governments at high level forums and/or conferences are much easier to be translated into real actions at national level. Active participation of mid-career officials in various environmental processes coupled with involvement of high ranking officials at high level events provides a promising foundation to the integrated approach at national level and contributes to the implementation of global agenda respectively.

Recommendations for UNEP: Facilitate dialogue, the sharing of experiences, peer learning and possible common actions; Assist countries in strengthening institutional capacities for the implementation of the SDGs through preparing the practical guidelines/explanatory notes for SDGs; Initiate discussions within each ministry on the SDGs and their national implications; Provide seminars/workshops for various stakeholders from the state authorities showcasing co-benefits of intersectoral cooperation. The mapping exercise for future projects, activities, priorities and goals would facilitate better understanding of particular mandates and responsibilities of each Ministry and serve as a basis for deeper inter-ministerial exchanges for the planning and implementation of the sustainable development goals; Support the application of the tools like TEEB at country level and ensure participation of local experts; Use the outcome of the WHO Environment and Health Ministerial Conference to promote the integrated approach and share the best practices, lessons learned and challenges.

The dialogue between government and stakeholders is an important part of policymaking and this practice is observed in Georgia. Ensuring public participation in decision making process is one of the obligations of the Aarhus Convention to which Georgia is party. Despite the fact that the Multilateral Agreements stand higher in the legislative hierarchy, lack of clear procedures in national legislation complicates the effective implementation of public consultation process.

Recommendation for national authorities: Transposition of the Aarhus Convention requirements into the national legislation; defining clear procedures to achieve real engagement of the public rather than merely following bureaucratic process.

CONCLUSIONS

Until recently environmental issues have not been adequately taken into account by the Georgian government in conventional economic analysis and decision-making. The discussion on whether economic development and environment protection are conflicting or complementary to each other, are still ongoing, however, series of steps taken recently by the government of Georgia aiming at integrating environment and development in decision-making, illustrate the willingness and potential of the government to make changes.

The willingness of the government to apply an integrated approach can be noticed in a number of environmental and sector specific policy documents setting strategic priorities for the country. The presented study has reviewed the main national strategic documents being adopted recently or being under preparation and revealed that attempts to integrate environmental issues as well as reflect SDGs in strategic planning are obvious. However, this was also noticed that more balance in favour of environment is needed and more efforts should be made.

The study has also analyzed the practice of developing the strategic documents and shared some lessons learned. The bottlenecks of existing practice are identified and recommendations provided. It should be noted that all sectors are open to include sustainable development principles in their respective strategic papers. However, it is also obvious that still, in some cases environmental integration approach is not sufficiently considered while developing strategies and policy documents of Georgia.

The study has concluded that for applying integrated approach several key optimum conditions should be guaranteed: political will, good understanding/knowledge and strategic thinking of decision makers; acceptance of environmental sector among politicians, decision makers and public at the same level as others; policy tools and mechanisms in place e.g. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Cost-benefit analysis (CBA), statistical analysis; stronger links between research institutes and decision makers; sufficient expenditure on environmental issues; increased responsibilities of Georgian regions as key players for making decisions on the ground and determining overall national success; greater involvement of the private sector and incentives for green business activities, eco-innovation; active society; strong international cooperation.

Furthermore, the role of international society in influencing the governments was emphasized and the need of close cooperation and active involvement of both mid-career and high level officials in international processes was reconfirmed.

Finally, desk study has revealed that most of the objectives of national strategic documents are in line with SDGs. However, clear linkages between national and global ambitions are still lacking. More work needs to be done for national target-setting process and further elaboration of concrete actions for actual implementation of the SDGs.

Therefore, the information contained in this desk/case study, and the follow-up discussions, recommendations, and lessons learned from the upcoming national workshop is intended to assist and support the efforts of the government of Georgia and stakeholders in the planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting, and review of policies and actions linked to the 2030 agenda, and in particular to support the develop of national portfolios of actions on environment and health as agreed at the Six Ministerial Conference on Environment Health.

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