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EU4Environment
Green Economy in Eastern Partner Countries

Executive summary
5th April 2024, 12:00 (Yerevan Time)
Meeting hall of House of Culture of Ararat City
2nd Consultation Session at the Emerald Site AM0000025 “Armash”
within the Framework of Capacity Building Program

I. Introduction

A capacity building event (4th event) was organized as part of the World Bank-led activities under EU4Environment Program sub-component 4.1: Support to protect biodiversity and natural ecosystems (Emerald network). Activities under this sub-component are aimed at advancing the establishment of the Emerald Network and management of the Emerald Sites in the Eastern Partner countries, including Armenia.

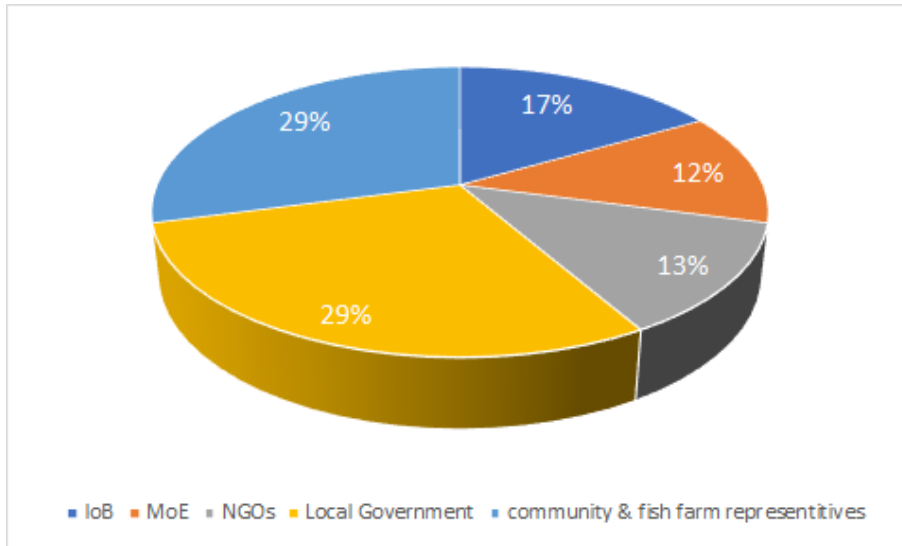
This event aimed to offer a valuable opportunity to relevant stakeholders, such as government officials, private sector representatives and local communities, to be informed about the advancements of the Emerald Network in Armenia and to enhance their knowledge regarding the management of Emerald sites.

II. Overview of Participants

24 persons participated in the event, from following organizations:

- Ministry of Environment (Hydrometeorology and Monitoring Center SNCO, Specially Protected Areas of Nature and Biodiversity Policy Department, BC Focal Point)
- Birdlinks NGO
- NABU Armenia
- FPWC
- Institute of Botany aft. A. Takhtajyan NAS RA
- Local administration of Ararat enlarged community
- Heads of communities (Ararat, Armash, Eraskh)
- Representatives of all target communities and fish farms (Ararat, Eraskh, Armash, Surenavan)*

* basically, all representatives of communities own or rent fish farms.



The complete list of participants is attached to the summary as separate document.

III. Objectives - Event Review

Objectives

The objectives of the event were to improve the capacities of the local target group on the management of Emerald sites and to present the advancement of Emerald Network in Armenia and new management plan for Armash site. The session was held in the Meeting hall of House of Culture of Ararat City and conducted by project team of the Project: Armenia: Advancing the establishment of the Emerald Network and management of the Emerald Sites.

Event Review

The meeting commenced with a welcome to all stakeholders and an introduction to the purpose of the meeting: to present and discuss the advancement of Emerald Network in Armenia and new management plan for Armash site. The project team provided a detailed presentation outlining the overview of the project and Emerald Network, key components of the plan, including specific Protected Objects, Conservation Objectives, Conservation Measures, Monitoring Plan and community engagement initiatives.



Discussion and Q&A session overview:

Topics of discussion included habitat and species conservation and management options, monitoring activities, governance structure, stakeholder engagement and the allocation of resources.

Stakeholders actively participated in the discussion, sharing their insights, concerns, and suggestions regarding various aspects of establishment of the Emerald site, its management and planned conservation measures.

NGO representatives mentioned following issues:

- Hunting and shooting of birds: This is a significant concern as it directly impacts bird populations
- Grazing: grazing activities are often uncontrolled or poorly managed, which can disrupt feeding and nesting areas for certain bird species. Grazing can lead to habitat degradation by trampling vegetation, altering landscape structure, and reducing food availability. As a

result, some bird populations may experience declines due to the loss or degradation of their habitat.

- Problems of water use management and mismanagement of water resources
- Common reed burnings: Burning of common reeds can alter the landscape and destroy important habitats for birds. Many bird species rely on reed beds for nesting and shelter, and their destruction can lead to population declines.

From fish farmers were raised list of problems which are currently prevent support for any conservation measures:

- Drying up of fish farms due to changes in the legal field: Fish farmers are facing financial burdens due to new regulations requiring them to pay for water usage according to water meters. Only one large and one medium-sized farms utilizing underground water sources while others rely on surface water. Additionally, fines for fluctuations in water levels further exacerbate the financial strain.
- Impact of bird species on fish farming: Fish farmers refute claims of hunting on their farms, stating that some bird species negatively affect fish farming by consuming minnows. They employ measures such as scaring and shooting to deter birds, rather than hunting them.
- Benefits of fish farming for the environment: Fish farmers highlight the environmental benefits of their operations, such as natural water cleaning processes and organic production methods.
- They also mention the historical context of fish farms being established for soil cleaning purposes due to soil salinity issues. Due to high salinity level after the fish farms are no longer operational, the land can only be utilized as pasture or arable land for a short period of time, typically one to two years.
- Awareness of species diversity: Fish farmers claim to have knowledge of flora and fauna and particularly the bird species diversity in the area.
- Challenges in selling and exporting fish: Fish farmers face difficulties in selling fish in local markets and find exporting unfeasible due to high costs, making their products uncompetitive internationally. However, they emphasize the importance of fish farming for ensuring food security in the country.
- Common reed burnings: Fish farmers attribute common reed burnings to third parties, indicating that they are not directly involved in such practices.

Local administration representatives mentioned following issues:

- Closure of fish farms due to financial reasons: Fish farms may become unprofitable or face multiple penalty fines, leading owners to cease operations. There is no mechanism in place to prevent this process, indicating a lack of regulatory support or intervention to sustain fish farming activities.
- Challenges related to hunting: Fish farms cannot completely avoid hunting activities as they are located within the officially recognized hunting area of Ararat marz.
- Issues related to farm exploitation: Various issues arise concerning the exploitation of fish farms, including challenges obtaining water permits and discrepancies in cadastral values based on the community or land type to which the farm belongs.
- Lack of administrative control over private lands: The administration faces difficulties in controlling activities such as shooting, hunting, burning, or uncontrolled grazing on private lands, which encompass fish farm areas. This indicates a limitation in regulatory oversight and enforcement on private properties.

Key points raised by stakeholders included the importance of balancing conservation efforts with socio-economic development.

Participants expressed their willingness to support the establishment of an Emerald site and conservation measures, contingent upon the provision of compensations and benefits by the Ministry of Environment (MoE) and other governmental bodies. This suggests that while there is general agreement on the importance of conservation efforts, participants also recognize the need for incentives or support to mitigate any potential negative impacts on their activities or livelihoods.



IV. Follow-up & Next Steps

Following the discussion, the project team expressed their appreciation for the valuable feedback provided by stakeholders. Team Leader Alla Aleksanyan mentioned that all comments from different stakeholders will be taken into account and stakeholder input will be incorporated into the final version of the management plan, conducting further consultations with relevant parties.

Additionally, Bern Convention Focal Point mentioned about further steps and efforts coordinated by MoE for establishment and advancement of the Emerald Network in Armenia.

V. Closing Remarks

Closing remarks were delivered by Alla Aleksanyan. She expressed gratitude to participants for the constructive discussion and also acknowledged the challenges discussed.

All participants reiterated their commitment to collaborative efforts in conserving and managing the Emerald Network Site effectively.