



Building a Greener Economic Environment

Forests for Local Economic Development - Albania



Forests are governed better if FPUAs and Federations enhance their Relevance and Sustainability.

November 2018

Connecting Natural Values & People Foundation

Enhanced Relevance and Sustainability of FPUAs and Federations for better Forest Governance in Albania

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Abbreviations

CNVP	Connecting Natural Values & People Foundation
FPUA	Forest and Pasture Users' Association
FLED	Forests for Local Economic Development
IPRO	Immovable Property Registration Office
LGU	Local Government Unit
MTE	Ministry of Tourism and Environment
NFCFP	National Federation of Communal Forest and Pastures
NRDP	Natural Resources Development Project
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Products
OAT	Organisational Assessment Tool
RF	Regional Federation
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency

1. Introduction

This paper provides insights in the impacts and lessons learnt of the **FLED-“Forests for Local Economic Development”** project on **Enhanced relevance and sustainability** of FPUA-s and Regional Federations in Albania. The project is implemented by Connecting Natural Values and People (CNVP) with financial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) during the period from July 2014 to December 2018. Main partners during the implementation have been the Forest Pastures Users Associations, Regional & National Federations, Ministry of Environment and Local Government Units of 24 Pilot former communes of 9 project implementation regions (Diber, Kukes, Korça, Shkoder, Elbasan, Gjirokaster, Tirana, Berat and Lezha).

This paper presents one of the stories on the project's impacts and lessons learnt of the project related to the functioning of the Forest Users Associations and Regional/National Federations as the main partner in the implementation of the project. It provides insights in the concepts, project activities, the outcomes and impacts, the challenges and opportunities. The story will function as a background document for learning and further use, capturing the results and experiences.



2. Background

Forests are a source of life: For the planet, and for its people. All societies are dependent on forests and trees... By harmonizing the needs of people and of the planet for forests, the world can progress along the path of sustainable development. But this harmonization cannot be achieved by the forest community alone. Bridges must be built with other sectors of society and a variety of actors..." (**Source: Statement of the World Forest Congress 2003**).

Building these bridges is part of governance which is participatory, transparent and accountable; and in which management and decision making are decentralized, transparent and accountable; people are empowered and participate; and partnerships flourish.

The legal and sub-legal acts enacted after the '90 in the framework of policies for decentralization of the natural resources management and the legalization of the long

existing informality such as the law on forests, the law on pastures and meadows, regulation No. 308 date 26.01.1996 “On the transfer of the communal forests and pastures under use and administration”, the law on local government (2000), on the public properties and on their transfer (2001), and later on the decision of Council of Ministers no 22 on 2008, have made possible the transfer of forests and pastures in property of former communes which was into force till 2013.

The Government of Albania started in 2015 to implement new administrative and territorial reforms by reducing the number of local government units (LGUs) from 384 communes and municipalities to 61 bigger municipalities. These are required to assume the responsibilities and challenges of managing local issues and priorities¹.

Through the recent territorial administrative reform, responsibility has been transferred to municipalities for rural and local economic development, part of which includes the management of 80% of Albania’s forest and pasture areas². The transfer process has been associated with capacity bottlenecks/challenges, including: limited municipal staff strength and competence in terms of technical management, economic planning and administrative skills; lack of valid and appropriate forest and pasture management plans; and lack of investment and operating expenditures with which to improve natural resource management. The new municipal managers, local associations and producers’ groups are still fragile, all of which have an important role to play in sustainable resource management through their participation in decision-making, raising awareness, providing a voice for, and representation of, the rural poor, advocacy and lobbying, and ensuring open communication and accountability by new decision-makers and elected representatives.

The forest law was amended and approved by parliament in May 2016.

The ten year moratorium on cutting timber approved in 2016 made it difficult for municipalities to fulfil the needs of their population for both firewood and income from forest harvesting. Therefore, there is an urgent need for approval by the government of specific decisions during the transition period, as well as drafting a new forest law.

Current sector challenges include: recognition of traditional users and their associations; registration of all forest and pasture land; the strengthening and financial sustainability of forest user associations; the integration of forestry into rural development financial support schemes; and the transfer process which has brought changes in management of the forest and pastures resources, as well as in livelihood strategies of individuals and households. Improved forest conditions have allowed local people to collect more firewood, and less time is required for its collection. The collection of forest products is increasing. In some cases, there has been an overall increase in revenues. The supply of some forest products has stabilized, thereby

¹<http://www.reformatoriale.al/en/>

²Of the remaining 20%, 17% is under protected areas and 3% is private forest.



ensuring sustainable development in future.

Communal/municipal forests and pastures have a distinctive feature of their management, in that they encompass many actors at various levels, from local to national. Local people are organised into Forest and Pastures Users' Associations (FPUAs) that are involved in the direct management and use of forests and pastures. The FPUAs and users are organised and represented further at regional and national level in Communal Forests and Pastures Federations.

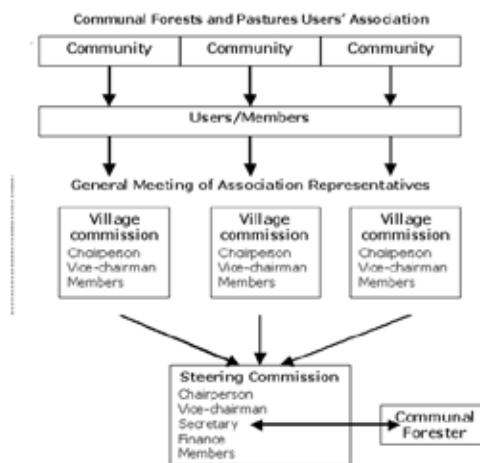
3 .Forest Users Associations and Federations in Albania

The forest users associations and Regional Federations are supporting the interest of communal forests owners and users regarding their forests. The associations represent users of family forests at different levels, provide information, capacity, provide lobbying and advocacy in their interest in forestry development, reform, decision making processes and policy dialogue, and help them in networking and relations building all with the overall aim of sustainable family forest management and economic development.

The support of CNVP started in 1999 with the Forestry Project of the World Bank and the Albanian Government which guided the establishment of the first Forest and Pasture Users' Associations (FPUA) for Communal Forests. Over 250 FPUAs were established and functional in 250 former communes in Albania, which were later organized in 10 Regional Federations (Diber, Tirana, Korça, Kukës, Berat, Pukë, Shkodër, Gjirokaster, Fier and Vlora). These Associations and Federations are represented at national level by the National Federation of Communal Forests and Pastures (NFCFP). All the FPUAs are registered in the court and, as per their statute, all the members of the community that make use of the communal forests and pastures are automatically members of the association. Besides direct investments in improving forest and pastures lands, the project also provided a wide range of activities that supported the intensification of the political reform and improving the process for rights of use and ownership of forests by local communities / individuals and especially FPUAs, as the main actor for the communal forest management. This process was very much linked to the transfer of ownership of communal forests and pastures from the State to the Local Government Units (LGU). This took place in 2008 and continued till 2015 in which LGU provided the communal forest and pastures in user rights to the people and with management and representation from the FPUAs. The Government of Albania started in 2015 to implement new administrative and territorial reforms by reducing the number of local government units (LGUs) from 384 communes and municipalities to 61 bigger municipalities which affected the FPUAs too. With a new territory and no communes FPUAs had to change their names and be reorganised in order to fit with the new developments.

In 2015 the Government of Albania started to implement new administrative and territorial reforms by reducing the number of local government units (LGUs) from 384 to 61 municipalities. This had an impact in the FPUAs too, which needed to redefine/change their statute and structure in order to fit with the new administrative reform. A new model of statute was prepared and shared with all FPUAs in target Administrative Units under FLED project. The forestry law amended in 2016 was expected to shed more light and bring more clarity on the roles and responsibilities of forestry related actors but instead brought more confusion and restrictions. Based on the law on Civil Society Organizations No 8788 (2001) FPUAs can carry out economic activities without having the need to establish a new entity for this reason. This would give FPUAs an incentive and would be an enabling environment for their financial sustainability.

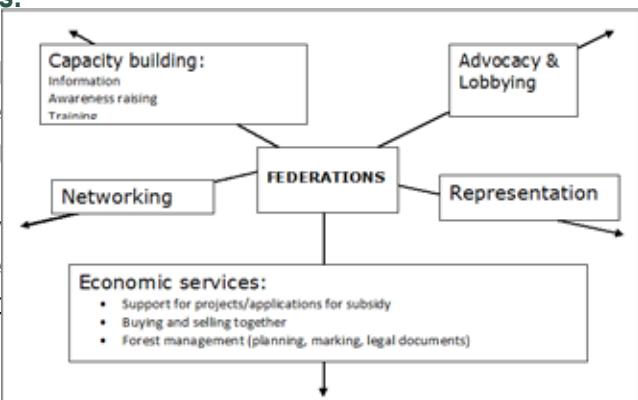
Organizational chart of Forest Pastures User Association



Regional Federations and National Federation

Objective of the Federations:

The National Federation and regional federations have a key role in influencing political and legal reform, including security of property rights for users and improve the management of the forest and pastures.



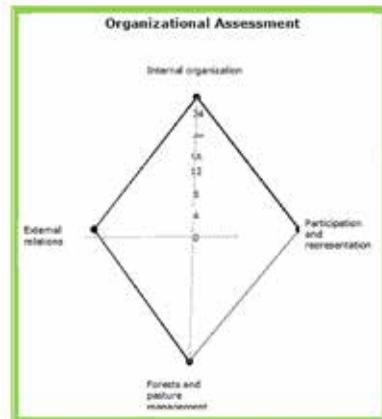
4. Organizational Assessment Tool (OAT) for FUAs and Federations

FLED project focused on building the capacities of FPUAs, using a coaching and self-reflection tool that can help FPUAs to improve their organisational functioning and become more effective through discussions and action plan development. The Organisational Assessment Tool (OAT) was implemented in all the 24 pilot FPUAs and Regional Federations.

The aim of the OAT was to facilitate the self-assessment for the FPUAs in order to improve their organisational functioning. The assessment was done at the beginning of the project with the aim of using the analyses and preparing an action plan to improve the situation and at the end of the project to measure the impact. The methodology used allowed the board members of the FPUAs to express their opinion, ideas by full participation. It created a common understanding of the statute of their FPUA, its strong and weak aspects and which aspects needed to be improved. During the assessment the FPUA board members had a clear “picture” of what the future of their organisation could be like and it gave insight for which areas the FPUA needs support and training for the capacity strengthening.

Four main aspects were reflected:

- 1) Internal organization, 2) Participation and representation, 3) FP Management,
- 4) External relations.



4.1 Internal organization

Internal organization reflects; Board and general meetings held; Financial management; Decision making within the board, Rules and Regulations; Task division; Filing and recording. FPUA-s reflected that the board meetings are held in general, sometimes are held regularly, and notes on meetings are kept, general meetings are done, but with little involvement of village commissions which is an issue that needs to be addressed

further for improvement.

Related to financial management FPUAs, finances are kept well, but the financial situation of the FPUAs is known only by a limited number of board members. FPUAs still recognize the problem with the tax system, issue that is been raised in many reflections with the Federations as well.

Decision-making at board level usually functions properly, still the issue that not all the board members are active and involved in development and further revenue income generation for the FPUA remains.

Statute and regulation of the FPUAs is known by the board members and it is partially known by other FPUA members. Board recognizes that it needed to focus more on the implementing activities as per the statute.

Task division is very clear at board level, village commission level, and all have clear roles and responsibilities. Documentation is a strong point that the organizations need to have. During the reflections it is clear that the board refers to Management Plan as the basic document of their work. Other documentation is very important, such as minutes, reports etc. The documentation should be easy to be accessed by all the FUA members.

4.2 Participation and Representation

Participation and Representation relates to- Involvement of women; Decision making at community level; Transparency; Conflict management, Community Participation; Village Commissions. Over the course of years, Gender has improved in all the levels. It is Important to mention that 40% are women elected in the boards of the pilot FPUAs compared to 0% before.



Women were mainly involved in the implementation of activities, not in decision making, at commune level, on strategic planning, producer groups etc. These good practices need to be expanded in other FPUAs as well.

At the community level decision-making is done mainly by the village commissions and with high involvement of users.

Transparency at the village level is given on the implemented activities based on the priorities set. Further input needed on the increased investment.

Regarding conflict management they are always resolved by consensus with the involvement of all parties as (community board, municipality, Forest Department).

At community level participation, specific attention is given to the poor and vulnerable groups.

The village Commissions are elected by the community and function well. However, more needs to be done on women participation within the village commissions.

4.3 Forest and Pasture Management

Forest and Pasture management reflects; Use of MP; Investments and tariffs; Knowledge on sustainable CFM; Implementation and Monitoring of Activities. The boards of FPUAs reflect that the Management Plans exist and they make use of it. There is only a direct number of members that are familiar with the MP, people are aware but partially implement it.

Investments are done mainly by donors, including community contributions but limited re-investment is made. Reinvestments are done in some forest and pasture lands. Some regions are more active in collection of fees and tariffs and reinvesting in other services. Further actions are needed to increase the reinvestment funding, and this includes active role of the Municipalities and FPUAs.

Traditional knowledge on sustainable management of forest and pastures is being practiced. Federations have supported on new methods and techniques, establishment of farmer forest models, and this has resulted as examples for the other farmers as well. Regarding monitoring the boards reflected that this is carried out by the village commission, but there is limited action based on lessons learned (this was reflected basically when there are project being implemented).

FPUA are actively involved in implementation of activities, community engagement, following timelines set by different projects. Further actions needed on new project development, rural development, making use of different resources.

Traditional methods on sustainable communal forestry are continuously applied. Combined methods as well are being applied fulfilling the application of criteria on sustainable use of forests and pastures.

4.4 External Relations

External relations reflect; External financial support; Relations with Municipalities; Relations with Forestry and Rural development Department; Relations with Regional federation; Relations with bordering FPUAs. It is reflected that in general the relations with other stakeholders involved in forestry sector are very well kept. Communication, support, knowledge is being shared with municipalities, forestry sector, neighbouring

FPUAs. Further support is needed on more clear roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder in forest management and other especially after the administrative reform of 2015 and the forestry law amended in 2016. Related to external knowledge and information it is reflected that information about forestry programs, developments and strategies on Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) is flowing from several resources from local and national level.

The overall results of the OAT showed that the target FPUAs that are fulfilling their role and make progress in their organisational functioning. Certain areas of attention remain for further development and focus on improved functioning should be disseminated.

5. FPUA and Regional Federations achievements under FLED Project

5.1 Improved structure and functioning of FPUAs, Regional Federations and National Federation through necessary institutional changes and democratic elections.

FPUAs, Regional federations and the National Federation, in 10 regions where FLED project is implemented, have received continues support from CNVP by coaching, advising and creating an enabling environment for them to hold their general meetings, support the process of reorganization, election of the boards where necessary, as well as agree on the roles and responsibilities of FPUAs and LGUs as per new law. A new model of FPUAs statute is prepared and circulated with FPUAs and regional federations. In 2015 Albania undertook the administrative reform which resulted in formation of new Municipalities, 61, and abolished the term Communes most of which were shrank. Most FPUAs were named Communal forest and pastures users associations and since the term Commune was no longer used there was a need to adapt to the new reform. All changes done need to be reflected in the statute and reflected in the Court. FPUAs are supported regularly to be able and remain a permanent structure after new administrative reform by representing traditional users in existing areas and playing their important role in forest and pastures management at municipality level.

However, there are also some cases where FPUA reorganization has encountered



obstacles , as the old heads of FPUAs are not willing to leave the positions and do not allow others to be elected at the same time. In some cases there are established new FPUAs with new boards.

Another challenge was that change of key board members in the associations as per the legislation relating to local associations, changes must first be notified through the court before changes can be made to signatories at the bank for the account of the association. This has been a long process creating obstacles and financial burden for FPUAs.

Regional federations and national association has been closely advised and coached in advocacy and lobbying issues as they have been highly involved in providing feedback and recommendations for the new Forest law. Due to many meetings with the members of parliament to raise their awareness on the importance of involving their recommendations in the new law, many are taken into account.

5.2 Increased capacities of targeted FPUAs

The Regional Federations and FPUAs have played a key role in all project activities and have been the main implementing partner for all the field based work. Each Federation has contributed to the development of the regional annual work plans and have a clear set of terms of reference with deliverables for their role in implementation and submission of monthly reports on the activities implemented and results achieved. This process, way of working has increased their capacity to plan, implement, monitor and report on activities, increasing their confidence and capacity to implement, facilitate, coordinate project related activities.



Other support was on increased capacity of Federations on how to apply for projects and financial support through other funding programmes as well. This has resulted to the finalization of project proposals and projects approved by different donors such as ESP, REC Albania, ALCDF, Swiss government etc. About 136 FPUAs at country level have applied to the first phase of ESP project grants out of which 60 succeed to sign the contacts with ARDA during 2017. The main obstacle that most FPUAs

have encountered is the fines that they had to pay to the Tax Office for their NIPT – registration number.

Specific attention has been put on the training and coaching the regional federations on better service provision to the members. Training skills and new concepts such as gender in forestry and women social and economic empowerment have been transferred to the regional federation's staffs.

During the second half of 2016 and 2017, CNVP initiated a series of regional consultation meetings/workshops with local stakeholders and the Ministry of Environment on how to improve legal and sublegal acts, in order to give more space to local stakeholders on forest and pastures management responsibilities.

Related to the capacity building component of this outcome a wide variety of trainings were delivered over the course of years in respective regions such as:

- ToT on gender mainstreaming and Women Economic Empowerment,
- Business Development and business plan preparation,
- Training to become familiar with the components (institutions, processes, and statutory & customary law) and principles such as transparency, accountability, rule of law and participation & social inclusion) of governance.
- Marketing and promotion,
- Forest governance,
- Proposal writing,
- Sustainable natural resources management,
- Financial management,
- Women and human rights, property rights,
- Policy and legal framework,
- Advocacy and lobbying.
- Farmer Forestry, Fire prevention, safety in Forestry,
- Property issue (guide for registration and identification of users)



These trainings helped the Regional Federations increase their capacities as Local Capacity Builders and provide training and awareness for the targeted FUA-s and Communes.

5.3 Increased service delivery of targeted Federations

Service provision to the members and paid services have been introduced to the regional Federations and FPUAs. In the frame work of NRDp project carbon sequestration was introduced, and in total there are 24 FPUAs that got credits for the carbon sequestration in 2014.

All regional and national Federations have identified their areas of **service provision** and prepared their working plans for further development. Based on that, regional and national federations provided services to FPUAs in applying for grants schemes of ESP/Agriculture, Rural Development Agency as part of ESP project. This is considered as very useful learning process and getting association prepared for the coming calls and other EU IPA/IPARD programs.

Many informative meetings are organised in the project regions with the mayors with the aim of informing them about the project implementation but also raising awareness of involving local actors such as FPUAs for different service deliveries in the local administrative units. FPUAs can be contracted by LGUs to prepare management plans, provide fuel wood for schools and other public institutions. RF support new municipalities for preparation of Annual Utilization plans, replication of models under FLED, helping with participatory, mapping, cadastral work etc. Forest management for farmers, organization of consultative meetings, local fairs etc.

Regional federations have been trained on business planning and product development and have prepared their business plans. The main aim of having the business plans is to create more opportunities for RF to deliver their services. The reforms which are undertaken have taken their time and the legal framework which is essential to see what space is available for regional federation services has stagnated the process.

Service delivery activities of Regional Federations, National Federation and FPUAs (supported by FLED project, which they can be contracted for):

- Mapping of forest user areas and set objectives for sustainable forest management of these areas.
- Supporting municipalities on cadastral registration
- Supporting municipalities on preparation and implementation of forest fires prevention and management plans.
- Supporting municipalities on preparation and implementation of forest

plantation projects.

- Supporting municipalities on preparation and implantation of Annual Utilisation Plans.
- Project preparation FUA-s & Federations
- Facilitation of new forest management techniques
- Discussion on fast growing species
- Replication of models (supporting municipalities)
- Project proposal preparation to FUA-s
- Project design to staff of municipality linked to annual planning
- Replication of models from FLED (municipality to replicate through project ideas developed)

This service provision needs to be further developed in the coming period by the Federation. It will strengthen their role and give more financial sustainability and will fill a need with CFP and to further professionalise CFP management.

5.4 Gender and women economic empowerment

Different appraisals have indicated that women and men participate and benefit differently in forestry programmers depending on their roles and responsibilities and gender needs. The studies also indicate that women are not well represented in decision making in local forestry related institutions, which is largely dominated by men. Women have limited access and control over forest resources. Although they are highly involved in forest activities such as grazing, medicinal plants collection, fodder collection etc.

CNVP has used the Law on Gender, which requires no less than 30 % women participation in decision making, as a setting stone for FPUAs and regional federations to increase women participation in their boards. Not only Albanian laws, but also other international conventions ratified by Albanian Parliament have been taken into account in order to raise awareness within men and women on the importance of participation and involvement as well and gender equality. Human rights, property rights, gender issues, gender roles, analyses and planning, the power of representation have also been topics of discussions.

Women participation has always been weak in all sectors in Albania not to mention forest one. Rural and remote areas have a very different mentality from urban ones especially related to women. Mentality that women are not born to be decision makers, lack of proper education, tradition, political influence, poverty, reluctance of men to leave positions they are used to have, lack of job opportunities and economic dependence on men makes it a very challenging environment for women residing in

rural areas.



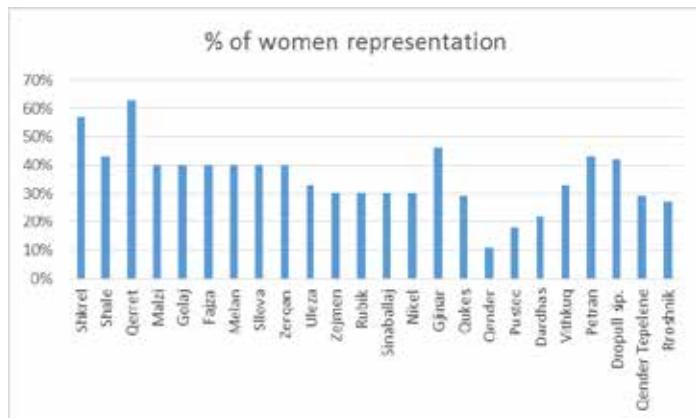
To promote gender awareness and increase women participation and representation in decision making process of forest and pasture areas, women's groups have been continually encouraged to participate in all project activities in target Administrative Units.

In order to increase the training capacities of the Regional Federations on gender concepts and women social and economic empowerment, a trainer of trainer's course was conducted in June 2016 for 20 local trainers by CNVP advisers. The course covered introduction to the project gender strategy; overview of gender issues in forestry; communication skills; gender awareness, participation and representation; organisation, legal rights, property rights and advocacy and women's economic empowerment.

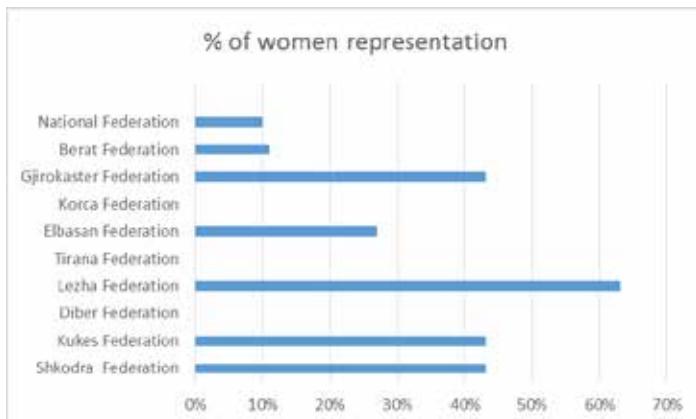
Understanding business through models, analysis, business planning; indicators of successful women's businesses and marketing skills; sustainable forest management and trainers skills development were also included.

Although the project has made big changes (participation of more women in FPUAs board from 5-10 % in the past up to 40 % in 2018) through awareness, coaching, training and exchange of experiences, and there are set of good examples established, things are still difficult for women who need further support to be strengthened socially and economically.

Women Representation in FPUA Boards



Women representation in Regional Federation Boards



5.5 Sharing and promoting

Promotion of successful models and sharing of good experiences at all levels local, regional and national was one of the approaches used in addressing gender challenges in the framework of the project. Important events are the organization of national conferences to celebrate International Rural Women's day each October 15th starting in 2012 and continuing each year. These events are organised in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and were widely attended (over 150 participants each year) from Tirana and the 9 regions of the project.

A series of case studies varying from gender issues and women economic empowerment to securing property rights, farmer forestry models, strengthening FPUAs and Federations, Advocacy and lobbying etc. were prepared to capture best practice and key learning from the project .

The events also included exhibition of products prepared by producer groups as examples of the range of rural products for promotion. These proved to be valuable experiences, linking policy level aspects with field reality of rural women.



Series of exchange visits were organised with producer groups within FPUAs and Federations from 24 target Administrative Units and 9 Regional Federations. These visits are organised within different regions in Albania and Kosovo where successful models particularly in Economic development are presented. Such exchange of experiences promoted women's role in forestry activities and their engagement in economic opportunities in the rural areas. In addition, communication and networking opportunities among actors in the value chain is increased.

5.6 Lobbying & advocacy

The project support for lobbying and advocacy efforts were focused on strengthening the capacities of the regional and national stakeholder civil society actors, in addressing change in the forestry sector in terms of legislation and in terms of sustainable management. 9 regional Federations of Korça, Kukes, Diber, Shkodra, Elbasan, Gjirokaster, Lezha, Berat and Tirana have collaborated with and supported Communes and Regions (Qark) to speed up the process of transfer of state properties towards local government units, with emphasis on the forest and pasture areas. In Tirana collaboration was with the Agency of Properties Transfer (IPRO), to improve communication with LGU. As a result of these activities LGU are now better informed on the property registration process, the steps to be taken, and the identification of users.

Since 2004 rural communities through Forestry Users Associations and later on through Regional Federations have been involved in advocacy campaign in order to change the forestry law and speed up the decentralization reforms in forestry sector in Albania. The Council of Ministers approved the transfer process of communal forest

and pastures in ownership to Local Government level in 2008. Regional Federations and National Federation have been essential and the main contributors in the Forest Law amendment of 2016

Networking and communication among FPUAs, Regional Federations and National Association is institutionalized and is functional. An important component of advocacy and lobbying has been the communication within and between related organizations as well as communication to a wider audience. For the audience this is often targeted to those dealing with or related to CFP. They have prepared and delivered newspaper articles, open letters and resolutions to all relevant central institutions and donors.

6. Challenges, opportunities and lessons learnt

The administrative reform in 2015 was expected to, among others, increase the participation of the local communities in sustainable management of their property and increase benefits from the forests and pastures. This would recognize the needs for forest products and services of the local population and their rights on their use & ownership.

Despite these positive developments, the transfer process and the management of forests with full rights of usage or property for the local community still have many deficiencies and shortcomings especially in dividing responsibilities and competences as well as sharing profits and investments in the communal forests.

Current sector challenges include: recognition of traditional users and their associations; registration of all forest and pasture land; the strengthening and financial sustainability of forest user associations; the integration of forestry into rural development financial support schemes; and the transfer process which has brought changes in management of the forest and pastures resources, as well as in livelihood strategies of individuals and households. Improved forest conditions have allowed local people to collect more firewood, and less time is required for its collection. The collection of forest products is increasing. In some cases, there has been an overall increase in revenues. The supply of some forest products has stabilized, thereby ensuring sustainable development in future

Based on the experiences of the CNVP advisors and importantly the main client-partners in this process, the following lessons were learned:

The combination in advisory work with technical expertise combined with community and social inclusion expertise provides a good balance in helping local organizations define their development goals, achieving development results consistent with local needs and priorities.

Making use of multi-stakeholder methods & practices promotes greater inclusion and better participation of key actors, facilitating better understanding of the needs

of different groups, and allowing the debate to clarify and negotiate new roles and responsibilities within the process.

Creating the space for an open debate in the communal forest sector supports better understanding and cooperation between individuals and organizations at different levels.

The Forest and Pastures Users Associations, are being supported how to be active in the process, how to benefit and clearly perform their role towards the rural communities. They are supported by Regional and National Federation on different aspects.

The fundamental lesson learned during this long process is giving time to local actors to observe the new developments and to create possibilities for further development.

The new developments in the forestry sector require attention and willingness in bringing the process forwards. The FPUA are and remain an important stakeholder in the forestry chain, but this gives also the role to support further the rural communities as having a big dependence on the forests, by being organized and functioning properly.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

Albania is one of the last Balkan Countries that is aiming the full integration in EU, meaning fulfilling the criteria's set and become a member country. Such process is reflected in the forestry sector too. Civil Society is an important actor that can support further developments and reforms in the forestry sector in Albania. Therefore the Regional and National Federations are seen as key actors in supporting the rural communities and providing the necessary services as far as their function and role allows. Other important aspect is focusing on Rural Development in Albania. Forestry is an important sector within it, and it requires the needed attention and progress to incorporate forestry well in the Rural Development policy and programmes in Albania. The Federations and the FPUAs are instrumental in implementation for rural development programmes and measures.

Forest and pastures in Albania are still under rehabilitation and require adaptation of new rules and regulations for proper management.

Although the decentralization of authority to local government was expected to provide greater recognition and respect more the rights of the actual users (the local communities), this is not assured and as such, economic activities from communal forests and pastures without official sanction are effectively regarded still as illegal. The 10 year moratorium approved by the government hampers the process too. There are a set of recommendation for the most important forestry related actors;

To Ministries;

- Participatory forest management and decentralisation including legal recognition of user rights is crucial for sustainable natural resource management and should therefore be supported by the government.
- FPUAs and federations play an indispensable role in decentralised forest management and should be recognised in the legislation as the main actor to support the management of forest and pasture land in the municipalities.
- Financial support is required for FPUAs to be able to fulfil their role and responsibilities fully.
- Forest can play an important contribution to rural development, green economy, clean water, soil protection, better environment, and climate change mitigation.
- Forests can provide employment opportunities in the rural areas.
- The inclusion of forest management in EU rural development schemes should be considered.
- Participation of concerned stakeholders (including women) at different levels, including the field level, in the policy development process and including their feedback and recommendations are essential for policy improvement and implementation.
- The potential of Albanian forests to produce fuelwood/ wood biomass as source of renewable energy in rural areas is under-utilised; supporting policies are required to realise this potential and to provide income generation opportunities in wood biomass value chains at the same time.

To Municipalities;

- Municipalities are owners of FP areas and need to build and increase their capacities to implement their new roles and responsibilities in sustainable natural resource management.
- Participatory forest management and decentralisation including legal recognition of user rights is crucial for sustainable natural resource management and should therefore be supported by the Municipalities
- Forest can play an important contribution to rural development, green economy, clean water, soil protection, a better environment, and climate change mitigation.
- Forests can provide employment opportunities in the rural areas
- FPUAs and federations play an indispensable role in decentralised forest management and should be recognised as one of the main actors to manage forest and pasture land in the municipalities.
- FPUA's can play an important role in supplying firewood to families and local

public institutions.

- Preparation of annual utilisation/ operational plans based on the existing FP management plans is needed to harmonise local forest needs at village level with economic developments of the municipalities.
- A system of fees and tariffs will help to generate funds which can be re-invested in forest and pasture management.
- CNVP in collaboration with universities has developed an online database with information on user contracts, technical parcel descriptions and other forest related data; this database can be very useful for Municipalities/ Administrative Units to inform proper decision-making, forest management and practice.

To Federations;

- Sustainable management of FP areas requires active engagement of National and Regional Federations in lobbying, advocacy and delivering services, and representing FP users at national and regional level.
- Need to lobby for user rights/ contracts for forest users.
- Federations need to extend their scope of service delivery and make use of business opportunities in order to become more (financially) sustainable; Federations could apply for IPA grants.
- Federations need to extend their networks (becoming part of the national rural development network and others).
- National Federations should take an active role in sharing information on EU forest and environmental directives and other international agreements.
- Federations need to review their structure and identify best options in response to the Administrative Reform.

To FPUAs;

- FPUA's are essential in decentralised forest management and therefore need to play an active role in representing FP users, FP management and securing user rights (incl. economical forest (and rural development activities of FP users)).
- FPUA's need to increase their capacities and memberships with special attention to the inclusion and enhancement of women participation in activities and decision-making processes.
- FPUA's should be pro-active and communicate their (potential) services to the municipality and administrative units, including on the role they could play in facilitating wood biomass value chains.
- FPUA's need to encourage forest users and particularly women to take actively part in FPUA's activities.

- FPUA's need to assess and strengthen their capacities in service delivery and make use of business opportunities to ensure their sustainability, for example FPUA's can apply for ESP grants.
- FPUA's in collaboration with the Federations need to review their structure and identify best options in response to the Administrative Reform
- FPUA's can play a role in supporting good forest governance and combating illegal forestry activities.

To donor community;

- CNVP is successful in project implementation and has demonstrated expertise related to FP (especially in decentralised FP management, property rights, strategic FP planning, rural development, producer groups, fees & tariffs and reinvestment, annual utilisation plans, grant schemes, user-oriented FP management strategies, creating income opportunities from FP areas, sample plot measurements and calculation of carbon sequestration, value chain development of NTFP and wood biomass as source for renewable energy, lobbying & advocacy, women economic empowerment, etc.).
- CNVP has the required capacities to continue strengthening decentralised forestry, rural development, gender inclusion, natural resource management, and environmental protection, CSO's in Albania and in the region.
- CNVP has access to an extended network at national, regional and field/local level.
- There is a need to expand and replicate FLED activities to other municipalities.



CNVP operates in the Balkan region. It focuses on natural resource management, forestry, agri-rural development and renewable energy, as well as the impact of climate change on the environment.

As a civil society organisation, CNVP acts as a facilitator to:

- Strengthen community capacity to achieve local development goals;
- Maximise the production and service potential of rural areas through sustainable and locally controlled natural resource management;
- Promote the use of natural resources to improve socio-economic development and rural livelihoods; and
- Conserve the bio-diversity of natural resources at a time of serious environmental and climate change.

Core Values

- **Green** – intervening to build a greener economic environment within the ongoing process of climate change
- **Clean** – promoting renewable energy and improved household/industrial waste management
- **Seen** – operating in the Balkans and the European Neighbourhood Space
- **Lean** – improving the efficiency of service delivery continuously and systematically
- **Committed** – working to achieve sustainable agri-rural and forestry development
- **Innovative** – incorporating new ideas into decision-making processes
- **Team** – sharing responsibility to achieve targeted results

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