



14 September 2016

MEMO

Forests in municipalities, challenges and opportunities of local communities

On September 10, 2016 representatives (MPs) of the Parliamentary Committee on Productive Activity, Trade and Environment, Ministry of Environment, Municipalities, Faculty of Forestry Sciences, Association for Local Autonomy, the Foundation "Connecting Natural Values and People", the National Federation of Communal Forests and Pastures met at the fifth meeting of the National Coordination and Consultative Committee.

The National Coordination and Consultative Committee has been set up to facilitate a national dialogue among the different actors involved in the governance of forests and pastures in Albania and to build an enabling policy, legal and institutional environment for securing traditional users pasture and forest rights.

The meeting was organized in the framework of the National Engagement Strategy, facilitated by the International Land Coalition and implemented by the National Federation of Communal Forests and Pastures of Albania.

Participants appreciated the contribution of the Committee and discussed with responsibility regarding the current challenges faced by the forestry sector. They particularly appreciated the concern and contribution of the members of parliament in the committee. Their suggestions to improve the governance of forests by municipalities and local communities were as follows:

The parliament:

- Organize more frequent public hearings with all stakeholders involved in the forestry sector regarding the draft law on forests.

The Ministry of Environment:

- Involve stakeholders in the discussions regarding the draft law on forest.
- Ensure transparency regarding the process of registration and inventory of forest.
- Facilitate the process of taking over of all documentation by the previous local units to Municipalities (relevant maps, statistical data on forests and pastures, projects, inventory and management plans, cadastral records with the forests and pastures area by destination as well as the changes that occurred over time).
- Allow further decentralization to Municipalities of competencies related to the approval of management plans, approval of forests activities for the improvement of forests in municipalities and non-timber forest products.
- Organize information meetings with technical staff of municipalities related with law enforcement and especially with decisions for the provision of firewood for local communities.
- The Ministry of Environment should require under applicable law the transfer of budget for over 600 employees to be included in the administration of the newly established municipalities.

The international organizations/donors/partners (World Bank, Swedish Embassy, EU Delegation, CNVP Foundation):

- Stronger support to legal and institutional reforms.
- Accelerate the process of evaluation of project proposals submitted in the framework of the Environmental Services Project by 136 Forest and Pastures Users Association and individuals.
- Review the monitoring mechanism of projects to be approved at ESP. Monitoring should be done by the staff of municipalities according the law number 48/2016, article 11, paragraph h (control and takeover of activities carried out in forests and pastures, despite the funding source).
- Further strengthening the capacities of Forests and Pastures Users Associations and Federations and promoting women's participation in decision-making processes.

The municipalities:

- Establish the directorate of forest service (DFS) in municipalities with skilled specialists and forestry education.
- Plan in short-term activities and services in the municipality. Design the strategy and general plans for the future development of the forests and pastures of the municipality.
- Define the forest area to be transferred in common use to the village and in use to rural families according to the tradition and the needs of families.
- Register the municipal forests and pastures in the Immoveable Property Registration Offices. Register the forests and pastures transferred in use of village and rural families (initial registration costs to be paid by the state).
- Support and promote cooperation with Forest and Pastures Users Associations and Federations.
- Equip municipalities' staff with necessary tools and infrastructure. This cost can be foreseen in the budgets of municipalities for 2017.
- Establish forest nurseries to meet the needs with seedlings produced in the country and promote tourist activities.

The Faculty of Forestry Sciences:

- Promote and deepen research on community forests.
- Provide a concrete contribution during the discussion and drafting of forests law.

The National Federation and Associations of Forests and Pastures:

- Continue to raise their voice for more rights for communities living near forests.
- Facilitate a national dialogue among various stakeholders involved in the governance of forests and pastures in Albania.
- Give continuous feedback on draft forest law.
- Continue strengthen the capacities of local communities and associations, as well as increase their awareness for sustainable forest management.
- Cooperate with the municipalities and their staff.

The Association for Local Autonomy:

- Exchange of experiences and dissemination of good models.
- Assist municipalities in appropriate planning of programs for the development of forests.
- Organize joint meetings and trainings for the staff of municipalities in cooperation with the National and Regional Federations and other organizations.