

Case Study

Strengthening forest management structure at municipality level

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Context

The forest sector in Albania has been constantly subject to frequent changes due to the application of different governmental programmes and reforms (territorial, decentralization, institutional reform, etc.), which evidences the lack of a sustainable strategy and a good analysis of this sector as well as the need for a deep and long-term reform. Until 2015, the Council of Ministers Decision no.22, 2008 on "The transfer of forests to LGUs" was in place and about 60 % of forest and pasture areas were transferred for management to communes /LGUs. The new administrative reform (2015) had also implication to the forestry sector. Through DCM No. 433 date 08.06.2016 all public forests and pastures areas that previously were owned by Central Government and by former communes are transferred in ownership to new municipalities.

This reform is considered as a strong political action that will give more power to municipalities in terms of management of natural resources as one of their new responsibilities. In the initial period 2016-2018, legal and institutional gaps have created difficulties in setting up and proper functioning of new forest structures in the new municipalities.

In May 2020 Albanian parliament approved the new forestry law #57/2020. According to this law, local government units (municipalities) has to set up their structure for forest management.

Shkoder municipality as other municipalities received from transfer process and area of about 31.000ha of forest and 5400 ha of pasture.

Shkodra municipality is target municipality for implementation of the project **"Afforestation, training and education for sustainable community-based forest management in Albania "funded by Austrian Lenzing Company and Austrian Development agency ADA.**

This case study is prepared during period Novemebr 2019- June 2020, through interviews with Aida Qirjo chief of the sector for management/protection of forest and pastures and meetings with other staff of Shkodra municipality during the period.

THE OBJECTIVE: Support municipalities to strength forest management structure for a better management of natural resources and increasing of incomes and employment for local communities, especially youth.

WHEN

The project "Afforestation, training and education for sustainable community-based forest management in Albania "started on 2019 in north of Albania (Shkodra region) and will work till 2022. This period of time is characterized by different important developments. New forestry law approved in the first half of 2020 and it provides the

the owner put the municipalities in a new role and implementation of the law by them needs efforts.

WHO

Shkoder municipality got its own forests and pasture areas and it is a new challenge because for the first time in Albania municipalities are involved in the management of forests in such large scale.

CNVP through implementation of this project aims to increase capacities of local stakeholders for sustainable community-based forest management.

WHY

Strengthening of local government management capacities has a high importance on sustainable forest management. Based on the new forest law article 16 and 17 municipalities are obligated to set up new structure for forest management. The structure is responsible for forest governance and it is a specialized structure at the local level, with management, control / inspection, technical and advisory attributes.

WHAT

The management structure at municipality is responsible for administration, governance and protection of the forest and pasture are within all its territory by hiring professional (forest engineers and technicians) and other support staff. The municipality has to employ in the management structure a total professional staff (forest engineers and technicians) based on the criteria specified in the new forest law as:

- a) One professional staff for an area of 750–1 000 ha (high forests)
- b) One professional staff for an area of 1 500–2 500 ha (low forests and shrubs)
- c) One professional staff for an area of 4,000–6,000ha, (pastures and meadows)

According to the information received from Shkodra municipality actually there are employed 13 staff (forest engineers and technicians) in the forest management structure, while according to the legal criteria it is needed a staff of 17 people.

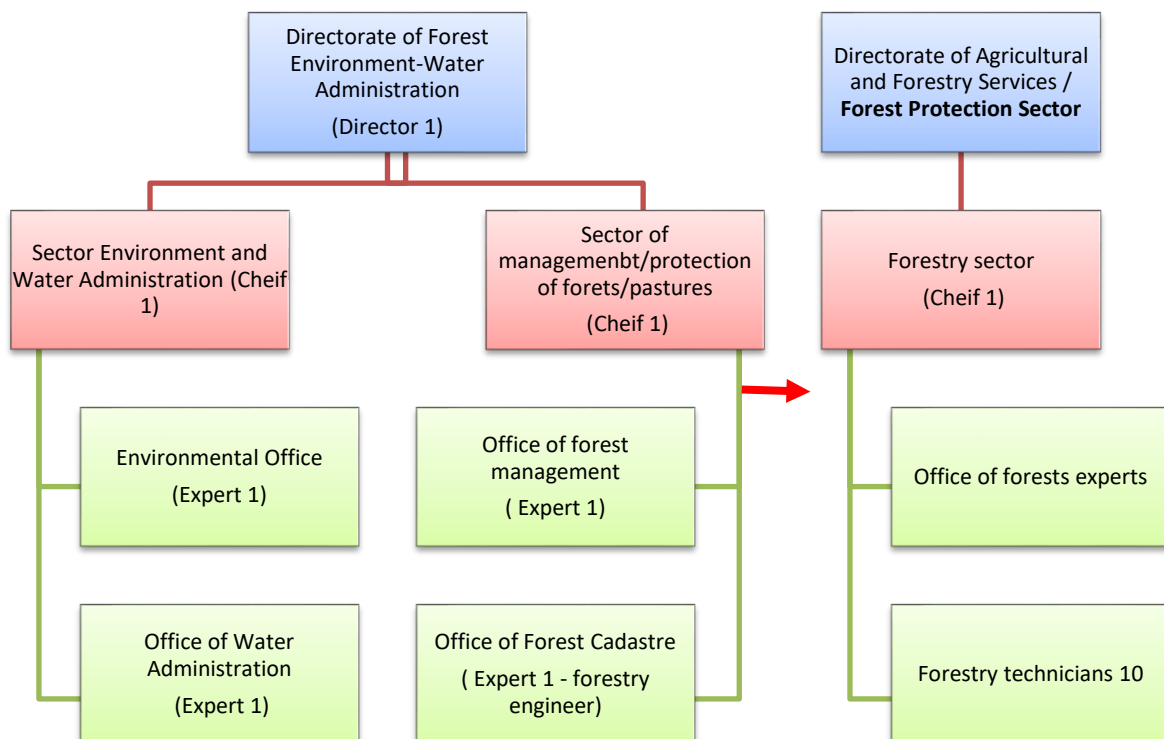
Current situation indicates that existing capacity in terms of human resources as well as understanding of forest and pasture management at local level is still limited. Awareness on the policy and legal framework, responsibilities for protection, management, and incomes generation from these resources is still weak. During the period several meetings including trainings under interdisciplinary vocational training component are organized with municipality staff. The focus was on tasks and responsibilities like:

- ✓ the overall administration of the national forest fund, public and private, within the administrative boundaries of the municipality;
- ✓ to establish and maintain the register of the national forest fund in the municipality, collecting data on the development of public and private forests, maintaining the biological balance in the local forest fund and keeping data on diseases, pests and fires in municipal and private forests, within the administrative territory of the municipality;
- ✓ to design, approve, implement and control the progress according to the operational plans, in accordance with the strategic planning documents and management plans, within the administrative territory of the municipality, cooperating with the institutions responsible for the environment, as well as administers all relevant documentation;
- ✓ to prepare projects for investments in forests, monitor and certify the works

performed in forests (by companies or FPUAs), regardless of the source of financing, support and approve the planning and implementation of interventions in forest including safety in forestry;

- ✓ monitoring the maintenance and operation of infrastructure in the public forest fund including forest fires protection;
- ✓ technical assistance and supervise the work for the improvement of eroded areas and the fight against erosion, landslides and avalanches within the territory of the municipality, by improved cooperation with local FPUAs
- ✓ to provide technical support through consultations with private owners and users (FPUAs) of community forests and their organizations, as well as organizes trainings and provides advisory services to them in accordance with and respecting gender equality;
- ✓ to cooperate for the development of forest research activities and supervise the development of wild flora and fauna and propose the protection of endangered, rare or endangered species;
- ✓ to cooperate with civil society and organizations established (FPUAs) on a legal basis with their object "forest", and guarantee the inclusion of the local population for the administration, governance and protection of the forest fund it owns
- ✓ to check and carry out inspection processes for the implementation of legal provisions and bylaws in force for forests, including activities carried out in the national forest fund by private and public entities, legal and physical, supervises the implementation of the conditions of permits, licenses and contractual obligations by on their part.

Chart below shows the current management structure set up in Shkoder municipality:



Challenges & Opportunities

#	Challenges	Opportunities
1	Lack of administrative acts for implementation of new law	a. National Forest Agency started to set up on September 2020 b. Preparation of rules, regulations and guides are priorities of this agency
2	All management plans are old and over passed the legal valid period of ten years	a. Municipality started to plan internal funds for preparation of new management plans b. Possible donors
2	Lack of infrastructure like computers, printers and electronic data related to forest/pasture areas.	c. Prioritization of these needs in budgeting for 2021 d. Possible donations
3	Limited human resources capacities on forests mapping issues	Training of staff on GIS and/or QGIS software
4	Lack of digital maps and sometimes even printed/scanned versions	a. Coordination with private company that is dealing with the first registration of forests/pastures of Shkodra municipality b. Presenting this issue to National Forest Agency
5	Lack of knowledges on new system of forest cadaster	Coordination with respective ministry and National Forest Agency

Recommendations

As a new structure the following actions are recommended:

- ✓ Continuing capacity building is required to strengthen local capacities, increase awareness and assure compliance with relevant national policies and laws.
- ✓ Increase cooperation with local actors and communities (i.e. FPUAs and other NGOs)
- ✓ Update and prepare new management plans as crucial to achieve sustainable management of forest and pasture areas.
- ✓ Continuing capacity building is also required for the consideration of forest and

pastures within the broader pattern of land use and rural development, respecting and inclusion of traditional forest and pasture users rights, acknowledgement in the public forest and pastures management of social patterns of land use and the needs of families for forest resources and related natural resource based incomes.

- ✓ Focus more on sustainability issues such as, better understanding of multi-purpose, multi-product forestry, climate change, bioenergy, environmental services, greater recognition and involvement of the rural people, in economic activities, and promotion of gender issues, including women's economic empowerment and market development is needed to full implementation of sustainable municipality forest management in the benefit of rural communities for forest and pastures related products and income and assuring ecological services for these natural resources.

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