

National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP)

The first National Environmental Action Plan of Azerbaijan was developed from 1995 to 1998 with the assistance of the World Bank in parallel with the first “wave” of NEAPs in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Based on a description of the current situation, it identifies the following problems requiring urgent actions:

- Pollution caused by industries;
- Threat of drastic decrease of the sturgeon stock triggered by a loss of reproductive capacity, pollution, and over-fishing;
- Deteriorating water quality, especially of drinking water, both in rural and in urban areas;
- Loss of fertile agricultural land from erosion, salinization, pollution with heavy metals and chemicals, and deteriorating irrigation systems;
- Threats to protected areas leading to losses in biodiversity;
- Loss of forestry cover, mainly in areas affected by the ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan;
- Damage to the Caspian coastal zone caused by flooding from a rise in sea level and pollution;

Deterioration of cultural heritage, due to natural causes, aggravated by modern environmental problems such as acid rain and uncontrolled development.

The NEAP also stresses the importance of policy reform and of integrating environmental and economic policies. Stemming from the description and analysis of those problems, the NEAP puts forward a list of environmental priorities, setting 32 objectives grouped in five categories:

- Pollution from industrial production, transport and other sources;
- The Caspian Sea;
- Forestry, land and biodiversity;
- Institutional development; and
- Policy.

Actions to achieve the objectives are identified and prioritized on the basis of human health, irreversible damage to natural resources and impediments to economic development. All actions are assigned to a specific government agency responsible for their implementation.

According to the Plan, the cost of each action varies between US\$ 5,000 and 5,000,000, and totals US\$ 42.5 mln. Actions identified as top priority are to be completed within one to two years; other priorities within two to five years.

Azerbaijan is referred to as one of less forested countries; forests account for 11.4% of the country's territory which is 2 times as less as the accepted by the world's forestry practice. Forests in Azerbaijan are not evenly spread over the country's territory. Besides, 251 thousand hectares which make 25% of the country's forestry cover are now under occupation by military forces of the Republic of Armenia. Over the past ten years forests have greatly suffered from widespread unsustainable logging. Illegal woodcutting has led to a considerable reduction in forests' reproduction ability. Reforestation is one of challenging issues at the agenda of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources.

An assessment and research in this field initiated led to development and a subsequent implementation of the National Reforestation Program. As stipulated by the Program, reforestation of less forested areas in lowlands of Azerbaijan and preparatory work on natural regeneration of 200 thousand hectares of forest and reforestation of 43 thousand hectares are being carried out.

Another environmental challenge is monitoring of ecological state of internal water reservoirs in the Absheron peninsula. A Program of Monitoring of lakes on the Absheron peninsula has been launched with the aim to:

- make analysis of water and sediments;
- identify the volume and quality of water feeding the lakes;
- develop small projects on mitigating negative effects of the lakes on environment.

Development and implementation of the National Program on Specially Protected Areas is of particular importance. Objectives include expanding the area of existing state natural reserves, allocation and acquisition of land for the creation of new reserves, and creation of national parks.

For the last 2 years 4 National Parks have been created on the basis of reserves. These are Shirvan, Girkan, Ag-Gel and Ordubad National Parks. The largest one is Shirvan National Park with a total area of 60

thousand hectares. In line with the National Program the Shakhdag, Gobustan, Murovdag and Burovar National parks with a total area of 614.2 thousand hectares are being created.

National Programme on Environmentally Sustainable Socio-economic Development (2003)

The National Programme on Environmentally Sustainable Socio-economic Development covers environmental aspects of the country's overall development strategy. It determines the main areas of sustainable development and includes a plan of action for 2003-2010 "to address the initial phase of the resolution of the current problems". The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources is to provide all necessary guidelines, application software and scientific data for its full implementation.

An integral part of the Programme is the Action Plan for its implementation, identifying activities, main implementing agencies and a timeframe for a range of sustainable development issues, including, environment, industry, agriculture, tourism, education, science and culture. The Programme is a good strategic document on the national level and serves as a clear guidance for actions in these areas for the next seven years.

National Programme for the Restoration and Expansion of Forests (2003)

Along with the National Programme on Environmentally Sustainable Socio-economic Development, the National Programme for the Restoration and Expansion of Forests was endorsed in 2003. It lists activities in ten sub-sectors, along with indicative data on implementation, responsible institutions, financial sources and performance indicators. This Programme represents an example of a reasonably descriptive sector plan in Azerbaijan.

Concept of Environmental Protection

The principles of state policy in the field of environmental protection have been specified in the "Ecological Concept of the Republic of Azerbaijan" developed in the early 1990s by the State Committee for the Environment. As with any other conceptual model, this concept is based on the principles of ecological security tested in practice, which were approved within Agenda 21 at the Conference held in Rio-de-Janeiro in 1992. As in all developed countries, the National Concept of environmental protection is oriented towards the provision of environmental safety and the improvement of the ecological situation in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The concept is based on selected priorities and general directions with the aim of implementing adequate measures to improve the environment. Briefly, they can be expressed as follows:

- Protection of the biosphere
- Continuous utilization of natural resources
- Decrease and disposal of waste
- Rational use of energy
- Reduction of risk associated with human activity

In order to realize these principles the development of a National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) with the aid of the World Bank for Reconstruction and Development is planned. The NEAP will be based on the National Concept of Actions on environmental protection; resolution of the UN Conference on the environment, development and social issues; substantiation of urgent measures and main directions for the provision of environmental safety and improvement of the ecological situation in the Republic of Azerbaijan.