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Towards EU standards in the Neretva river basin (BiH): Linking water management and biodiversity conservation

MFA project number: 2060237

Technical Final Report

Reporting Period: October 2006 – 31 December 2007



Figure 1 : Artificial Rama lake on Rama river (going to Neretva river), Bosnia and Herzegovina © WWF Canon / M Gunther.

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Project Title: *Towards EU standards in the Neretva river basin (BiH): Linking water management and biodiversity conservation*

Project Number: 2060237

Subject: Biodiversity Conservation, Integrated River Basin Management

Region: Neretva river basin

Countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Duration: 15 months (1 October 2007 – 31 December 2007) – Phase 1

Performer: WWF Norway / WWF MedPO

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Reporting Period: 1 September 2007 – 31 December 2007

Abbreviations:

BD	Birds Directive
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CBD	Convention on Biodiversity
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EF	Environmental Flow
FBiH	Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina
GEF	Global Environment Facility
HD	Habitat Directive
IRBM	Integrated River Basin Management
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RS	Republika Srpska
SAC	Special Area for Conservation
SPA	Special Protection Area
WB	World Bank
WFD	Water Framework Directive

1. Executive Summary

In June 2006 WWF Norway and WWF MedPO organized a consultation workshop with key stakeholders to identify priorities and needs with local partners (governmental and non governmental) and shape Living Neretva project. The outcome was the proposal submitted to the Norwegian government which was approved in fall 2006. This report described the first phase of work devoted to take off important processes of alignment to EU standards in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) thanks to Norwegian interest and support.

The project achieved the expected results listed in the project proposal. This first phase of activities was extremely strategic in the relationship to BiH government whose commitment has been fully achieved. This first phase (15 months) of work was instrumental in moving the first steps for the identification of biodiversity hotspots (the Natura 2000 network of the Habitat Directive) in the Neretva basin and it aimed at fostering a dialogue among stakeholders and public participation (article 14 of the WFD) with the long term goal of solving the conflicts among water users and agree on Neretva river environmental flow.

WWF mainstreamed the project activities into the governmental agenda of BiH substantially contributing to the implementation of adopted BiH strategy documents, with special emphasis to the National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP). The NEAP identified among its priorities “sustainable rural development” and “improved protection of biological diversity”. The project also contributed to the implementation of the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) signed by Bosnia and Herzegovina government in 2002 supporting in particular the implementation of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas of the CBD.

What is the project about ?

The project objectives spelled out in the proposal are:

1. Set the ground for mapping biodiversity values and hotspots in the Neretva basin in accordance to the Habitat Directive (HD) principles
2. Initiate a multi-stakeholder process for integrated river management in accordance to Water Framework Directive (WFD) principles
3. Strengthening civil society, to ensure proper public participation in river management and support democratic development

Three main tools chosen to achieve the project objectives are:

- Habitat Directive implementation in the project area for the identification of biodiversity values and hotspots in the Neretva river basin, and the establishment of protected areas;
- Water Framework Directive principles implementation in the project area, for environmental flow assessment, and the economic evaluation of different management options and environmental services Neretva provides;
- Capacity building of local NGOs and other stakeholders, based on the experience and methodology of the WWF Across The Waters programme, in order to support active participation of CSO in the above mentioned processes.

The project set up a take-off platform for a full implementation of EU standards in BiH consisting of:

- i) The creation of three working groups that devised action plans for a) identifying N2000 network in a pilot area, b) calculating environmental flow in a sub-basin and c) developing the economic analysis of the WFD in preparation to the development of river basin management plans;
- ii) Identification of key stakeholders and their engagement in HD and WFD principles application;
- iii) Strengthening the capacity of key actors to implement the work in the long run.



Figure 2: Upper Neretva river (upstream Konjic) where a new dam will be built and Mostar on Neretva river © WWF Canon / M. Gunther.

The main activities implemented :

- Preparation and implementation of WGs meetings ensuring the participation of representatives of entity ministries responsible for environment or water management (FBiH and RS entities are responsible for water management and for environment, that is not responsibility of the state level, except for international contacts);
- Report elaboration of the three working groups (Environmental Flow working group WFD-WG1; Economic Value working group WFD-WG2; EU Biodiversity Standards Scientific Coordination working group HD WG) under the supervision of key experts and resulting in the delivery of 3 draft reports in September and the final reports in October 2007;

- Bilateral meetings and contacts with international organizations (e.g. World Bank, delegation of the European Commission, Spanish Cooperation, Regional Environmental Center, etc.), public administrations relevant to water management and environment, ministries responsible for environment or water management in both entities and at the state level, and public administrations at a local level responsible for water management. For a complete list of contact made refer to annex 3;
- Organization and implementation of the meeting “Towards Common Vision for Neretva river” that was organized in order to present the reports provided by the three working groups, as well as to present and discuss the activities of the project second phase;

The Following are noteworthy results:

- Representatives of Ministries are very supportive of the project and are committed to use key principles and tools of the Habitat and Water Framework Directives;
- WWF is perceived as a key actor in nature conservation and sustainable development being a neutral international organization and is seen by the government as an opportunity to get technical support to align to EU standards;
- Three reports are fully developed and describe the steps towards HD and WFD implementation in BiH.

Engagement of the BiH government in the implementation of HD and WFD principles

Key representatives of the government at both entities level confirmed that they see WWF support in aligning to Eu standards as a very valuable opportunity. The Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry of Republika Srpska wrote an official letter and referring to the report on Economic Evaluation stated that even though the document is broad in their opinion, they are confident that it will be of valuable use for the administration of Republika Srpska to prepare the management plan and program of work for the Trebisnjica river basin (soon to be prepared). Furthermore, the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry of FBiH sent an official letter to the Agency for Sava river basin advising the agency to read reports prepared under Living Neretva project (even though the agency is not under their responsibility) specifying that the report on Environmental Flow "... is educative and very interesting for hydro engineers and water experts. We believe that all technical structures of the water sector should be introduced to this issue. The report conclusions are still vague but the material represents only the first phase of the research and the next phase of the project is expected to fully define the methodology of EF calculation for Neretva basin. This pilot process though can be up-scaled to the whole BiH. In any case the material developed by Living Neretva project deserves to be complimented".

2. WWF Ecoregional Targets

The project is located in one of WWF's priority Global 200 ecoregions, "Balkan rivers and streams", and contributes to the targets and milestones of the WWF Global Freshwater Programme, namely to the following ones:

Target	Milestone	Project contribution
<p>Target 1: Conserving River Basins and Ecoregions: Freshwater habitats and environmental processes are maintained or restored in at least 50 river basins and ecoregions by 2010</p>	<p>Milestone 1.1 Major river basin initiatives for conservation and restoration of the environment have been adopted by the governments and commenced in at least 25 priority ecoregions by 2007</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-establishment of environmental flow in Neretva river (long term contribution)
<p>Target 2: Sustainable water use</p>	<p>Milestone 2.1 By 2007, at least 20 WWF initiatives in priority river basins and ecoregions have resulted in either stopping or significantly modifying the operations of water infrastructure schemes, or have established national strategies that reduce the demand for new dams</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improving performance of existing dams along Neretva river by restoring environmental flow (long term contribution)
<p>Target 3: Conserving freshwater habitats</p>	<p>Milestone 3.1 An additional 45 million hectares of representative freshwater habitats are protected by June 2007 in priority river basins and ecoregions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Preparing the ground for Natura 2000 networking identification and protection

3. Project Successes

Interest and commitment of key BiH administrations in implementing principles of HD and WFD achieved

- The interest of the BiH government on the implementation of the key principles of the Habitat Directive and the Water Framework Directive has been raised. The administrations have shown a strong motivation but also the appreciation for WWF support in undertaking this path that without technical support and steering would be very challenging for the government;
- The project activities have been fully mainstreamed into the governmental agenda of water and nature resource management policies.



Figure 3. Neretva river © WWF Canon / M. Gunther.

Cooperation between the civil society (WWF) and BiH government successful and fruitful

- The combination of i) resources available ii) skilled staff based locally and well rooted in the political arena and iii) WWF experience all over Europe capitalized in BiH has proved invaluable and well performing. WWF has been able to transfer the experience gained in EU countries through local staff to the BiH government and has gained a key position in terms of support to the government to alignment to EU standards.

Capacity strengthened and awareness of civil society raised

- The working group created to develop the key reports in N2000, environmental flow and economic evaluation have gained an understanding and knowledge of the HD and WFD Directives
- Awareness of children living in Neretva basin about the nature values of their land has been raised.
- A website portraying the project in a simple visual way has been created on the main WWF website (www.panda.org/livingneretva). Key material and documents relating to the working of the working groups have been uploaded to be fully accessible to anyone interested.

4. Progress on Activities and related financial issues

Overall

The working plan developed at the beginning of the project has been fully implemented. The working groups, supervised technically by international experts and coordinated by the local project coordinator, completed and delivered their reports. The reports were in turn reviewed, commented and endorsed by the local BiH administration representatives. The reports were also presented to NGOs and the general public in the occasion of the "Towards Common Vision" meeting and were made widely accessible on Living Neretva web site.

Several bilateral meetings were held (see annex 1 and 3 for a complete list). The objective of these contacts has been to harmonize the Living Neretva project activities and results with ongoing projects/initiatives/policies already existing in the region and supported by the institutions met, avoid any potential duplications, and increase the interest of the BiH government on the Water Framework Directive and the Habitat Directive. This "silent" lobbying has proved to be successful and well received by all the organizations met.

Activity 0a.

- The first 3 months of the project (October till December 2006) was devoted to create the conditions at local level for the project to be implemented. The position of project coordinator was announced and interviews carried out. As a result Mr Branko Vucijak was selected. Mr B. Vucijak started his position as local project coordinator on 1 December 2006 and is based in the premises of the NGO "Center for Environmentally Sustainable Development" in Sarajevo. Mr Vucijak has 22 years of experience in the water and environment sectors and a solid knowledge of environmental policies, institutional settings and project management. In addition to coordinating the Living Neretva project, he will also supervise another WWF project in the Neretva basin (covering part of his salary) the project coordinator of which will support the Living Neretva project with preparation and organization of local events in Mostar. This solution has allowed us to hire a highly qualified person as Mr Vucijak and at the same time ensure coordination between two WWF projects related to the Neretva basin.

Objective 1. Set the ground for mapping biodiversity values and hotspots in the Neretva basin in accordance to the Habitat Directive principles

Activities 1b and 1c.

- A group consisting of local scientists, authorities and other competent stakeholders was identified, given necessary training in April 2007, and officially framed into a working group ("HD-WG") mandated to deliver a final report on the applicability of HD principles to Neretva basin. Several meetings of the HD-WG were organized (i.e. second joint WGs meeting in Mostar on September 19th and third joint WGs meeting in Konjic on October 22nd) for developing a methodology and an action plan for identifying biodiversity values and hotspots in the Neretva river basin according to the standards of the Habitat Directive. The

report summarizing the working and findings of the working group was drafted and delivered on September 15 to be then reviewed and commented by local BiH public administration representatives, specifically by representatives of: Federal Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Republika Srpska Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and Ecology, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry, Republika Srpska Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management and Public Water Management Enterprise for Adriatic Sea Catchment Area from Mostar. On the basis of comments received and specific requests of supervisors and public administration representatives, the working group revised and amended their work and delivered the final report on October 15 (annex 4).

Objective 2. Initiate a multi-stakeholder process for integrated river management in accordance to Water Framework Directive principles

Activities 2b and 2c.

- A group consisting of local scientists, authorities and other competent stakeholders was established and given necessary training in April 2007, and framed into two working groups (“WFD-WG1” focused on environmental flow and “WFD-WG2” focused on economic evaluation). Several meetings of the WFD-WG1 and WFD-WG2 were organized (i.e. second joint WGs meeting in Mostar on September 19th and third joint WGs meeting in Konjic on October 22nd). The meetings of the two working groups had the objectives of i) identifying the most suitable methodology to calculate environmental water flow (and the related water management activities required) in Neretva river context, ii) develop an action plan for the concrete calculation of environmental flow in Neretva river, iii) identifying the best methodology to estimate the economic benefit of different water management options in the Neretva river basin. This latter exercise was fully adapted to the economic analysis prescribed by the WFD that requires the characterization of the basin (description of water users and uses), the selection of different management measures and their economic analysis in terms of cost/benefit and cost/effectiveness. The two reports summarizing the findings and an action plan for the calculation of environmental flow and the economic evaluation of water uses was drafted and delivered on September 15. Afterwards they were reviewed and commented by local BiH public administration representatives, specifically by representatives of: Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry, Republika Srpska Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management and Public Water Management Enterprise for Adriatic Sea Catchment Area from Mostar, so as representatives of Federal Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Republika Srpska Ministry of Spatial Planning, Construction and Ecology. On the basis of comments received and specific requests of supervisors and public administration representatives, the working groups revised and amended their work and delivered the final reports on October 15 (annex 5 and 6).



Figure 4. Training workshop in Sarajevo. Facilitator Rasmus Reinvang, WWF Norway, standing. (photo: Branko Vucijak).

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Activity 2d.

- A report on needs, gaps and possible timeline for adaptation to EU WFD-standards and implementation of integrated river basin management in the Neretva basin was produced by the local project coordinator, to serve as a basis for the future process. This report is build up on the following documents and analysis:
 - European Commission, DG ENV, Progress Monitoring for the countries of South East Europe ("pre-candidates"), Progress Monitoring Report, Year 10 – 2007, Bosnia Herzegovina – FBiH, July 2007,
 - European Commission, DG ENV, Progress Monitoring for the countries of South East Europe ("pre-candidates") Progress Monitoring Report, Year 10 – 2007, Bosnia Herzegovina - Republic Srpska, July 2007,
 - Draft project appraisal document on a GEF trust fund Neretva and Trebisnjica river basin management project,
 - Water Law of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina),
 - Water Law of Republika Srpska (Entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Activity 2e.

- A round table with Neretva basin stakeholders, named "Towards a Common Vision", was organized in Mostar on 28 November 2007 to start defining a common vision for the Neretva basin among main stakeholders. The meeting was attended by 35 participants, among the most noteworthy: representatives from Herzegovina-Neretva Canton responsible for environment, Public Water Management Enterprise for Adriatic Sea Catchment Area, municipalities from the basin, NGOs and experts. The meeting was successful due to i) the high participation to the meeting, ii) the high interest showed by the audience for each of the reports presented, as well as for the draft list of potential next activities in the basin. (See annex 1 for meeting agenda and report).

Objective 3. Strengthening civil society, to ensure proper public participation in river management and support democratic development

Activity 3.a.

- A training on Conservation Action Planning was organized by WWF in collaboration with the international NGO The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and attended by local stakeholders including the Living Neretva coordinator Mr B. Vucjiak. The training aimed at improving skills of participants in effective strategies development for nature resource conservation. The training, organized in Italy, provided the participants with the following skills: conservation targets selection, situation analysis including analysis of threats, development of strategic activities to impact on identified threats, monitoring and evaluation, use of a software dedicated to conservation action planning. The training revolved around case studies, one of which was the Neretva basin. The Neretva team was requested to make some preparatory working before the training. During the training, in the working group sessions, the Neretva team applied concepts explained in plenary session to develop a conservation action plan for Neretva basin. The training was an occasion to brainstorm about Neretva basin problems and potential solutions, and to connect relevant stakeholders.
- A training on HD and WFD directives has been organized in Sarajevo on 12 April 2007. The basic principles of N2000 identification and of environmental flow calculation were described and interest from participants to take part to the project explored.
- Each working group was supervised and guided by experts in the topics of each working group (N2000, environmental flow, economic evaluation). These experts have transferred knowledge on the various issues along the working of the working groups by providing material to read, replying to questions and debating on problems encountered in drafting the reports.

Activity 3.b.

- A small grants programme for local NGOs was ran with the objective of involving local NGOs in raising the awareness of school children on the value of Neretva river. A call for proposals has been launched in spring 2007 and three grants awarded to local NGOs in summer 2007 (Bura, Youth Center Livno and CESD). Each NGO organized and ran summer camps for school children in three different locations of Neretva (Boracko lake, Livanjsko polje and Hutovo Blato). Some 60 children (age spanning from 6 to 14) in total were exposed to nature. The camps showed that the level of awareness of natural values in the region is poor and more raising awareness activities would be beneficial (see summer camps reports in annex 7 and 8).



Figure 5 : Summer camp in Hutovo Blato wetland and drawing of the wetland (photos : BURA) prepared by students during the summer camp.

- Another small grant was awarded to a consortium of local NGOs in the lower Neretva to pave the way to the application of the principles of the EU Biodiversity Protection Standards (BHD/Natura 2000) in BiH. Grant objective was to promote knowledge of the Directive and stress the advantages of implementing its principles among lower Neretva stakeholders. As a first step, the grant built the capacity of selected NGO's on Directive issues; afterwards, the NGOs consortium – after running a stakeholders' analysis and having identified constrains – worked to raise awareness on Directive principles and the benefits of its application among relevant actors. To this end, the consortium elaborated a basic guidelines to promote the

Directive in the lower Neretva and designed a “Strategic Guide” as basis of project follow-up (including goals, desired outcomes, tools, messages, needed resources) taking inspiration also from other countries experience (e.g. Croatia). The grant is still on going due to unforeseen complications and is due to end in March 2008.

Activity 3.c.

- A Living Neretva project webpage was created in local language and in English (respectively www.panda.org/zivjetineretvu and www.panda.org/livingneretva). It aims at sharing information on nature conservation and sustainable development in the Neretva basin, as well as on the project goals, vision and activities, not only with the main target groups concerned but also with a broader public. Three videos have been realized to describe in a quick and appealing way the values of Neretva river and the main issues seen with the eyes of the locals stakeholders. A brief flash animation including a map opens the web page to describe in a snapshot the river basin and the main issues at stake. All relevant documents, reports and presentations produced by the Living Neretva project are published on the site, enabling full transparency and exchange of information on the project themes and activities.

5. Problems and Constraints

No major problems or constraints affected the progress of the project. Project implementation was extended with 4 months (till December 2007), due to the fact that identifying and hiring project implementation staff in Bosnia and Hercegovina took 2 months longer than expected.

Significant change to the external environment in which the project is operating, in comparison to the one existing during the project preparation, is that a new Water Law was adopted in both BiH entities and is expected to be in force starting presumably in January 2008 or few months later (even though it was supposed to be in force from July 2007). The new Water Law is harmonized with the EU Water Framework Directive. It sets specific deadlines for provision of water management strategy (end of 2009) and water management plans (end of 2012). The new law prescribes the creation of the Water Agency for the Adriatic Sea basin and the Sava River basin after 6 months after the Water Law adoption. Due to the existence of two entities in BiH that share the two basins two agencies for each of the basins will be established (in total 4 agencies will be established). Being the Water Agencies for Adriatic Sea basin (one in Mostar for FBiH and another one in Trebinje for RS) the key interlocutor for the project objectives, their establishment is important for the project implementation in the next phases. In order to start full speed the collaboration with this key administration, once it will be established, the project coordinator has made an effort to keep a close cooperation with entity ministries responsible for water management and existing Public Water Management Enterprise for Adriatic basin in FBiH and Directorate for Waters in RS. These administrations are those responsible for water management and nature resources in Neretva basin till the new basin agency is established.

6. Unexpected effects

None.

7. Learning and Sharing

It is important to underline that the stakeholders, in particular the civil society, in Neretva river basin have been recently focusing their interest and actions on the construction of new dams and operations of the existing ones (being pro or con according to the interest group). Governments of the two entities in fact have announced plans to construct new (quite numerous small and few big, still discussed) hydropower plants in the basin. New dams are opposed by environmental NGOs and civil society more in general, while the energy sector is lobbying for their construction. This is creating a very conflicting environment. This is partly the reason why the topic of environmental flow was highly supported and recognized as relevant for addressing the issue of dams operations.



Figure 6. Jablanica dam on Neretva river © WWF Canon / M. Gunther.

8. Adaptive Management

The initial plan of evaluating the services provided by Neretva basins has been slightly adjusted to the priorities of BiH government. Their interest in fact towards alignment to EU

standards and the soon to be adopted new water law (aligned to WFD) has steered this component towards the economic analysis of water uses prescribed by the WFD. WWF fully supports the WFD as a good practice of water management hence has taken on board the opportunity created.

9. Communications activities and achievements

The communications work has focused its efforts on preparing a website www.panda.org/zivjetineretvu and paving the ground for the project visibility. Through discussions with the team, the objectives of the web site have been set as follows:

- to inform people in BiH about the Living Neretva project in local language and to target a broader audience outside BiH through an English version;
- to provide all Living Neretva project documents, reports and presentations, enabling transparency and exchange of information with the main target groups;
- to raise the profile of Neretva river basin (nationally and internationally);
- to provide enticing materials to describe the values of the basin and the issues at stake;
- to introduce WWF brand in BiH.

The web site is hosted by WWF International web site www.panda.org under the Mediterranean programme section at www.panda.org/zivjetineretvu. Panda.org receives everyday 15 000 visitors and it is one of the most respected and visited environmental web sites worldwide. This will allow increasing importantly Neretva profile.

In addition, an analysis of the main communications channels and stakeholders in the country has been conducted for developing a communications recommendation and providing guidance for Neretva profile enhancement.

Professional high quality pictures of the basin have been collected and will be used in the future for the production of communications material and distribution to media. The video material (a series of 19 interviews and three edited videos) as well as the flash animation will also be used in meetings for opening discussions with stakeholders or with donors to present the project in a nutshell and in an enticing manner. The video materials provide in a transparent way the positions of the public administration and the NGO sector regarding the Neretva basin management issues, as well as its values.



Figure 7 : Interview to a local NGO to produce web videos and Neretva river (photos: Branko Vucijak).

10. Communications/ adaptive management, lessons

No specific difficulty or limitation encountered related to communications or adaptive management to be reported.

11. Future Challenges

- The future challenge will be to keep high the interest of the administrations and step into a more practical phase. This implies that the new water laws are officially adopted by the two entities of BiH and the support given by WWF will be considered as part of the implementation of the water laws enforcement;
- The calculation of environmental flow in a pilot area will heavily rely on availability and accessibility of data;

12. Overall Assessment

In general the project made the expected progress against the revised action plan (see annex 3). Activities were launched on time and completed according to the proposed schedule. The problems and constrains described in paragraph 5 did not jeopardize the overall implementation process. The funds requested for different activities proved to be adequate. The members of WGs had enough professional skills and group working ability, and were committed to produce appropriate results, supervised by public administration representatives and engaged international experts.