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Rhodopi Mountains Landscape, Organic Farming and Business

Biodiversity of the Rhodopes and how organic farming can contribute to its conservation – experience from the past 5 years

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Project “Conservation of Globally Significant Biodiversity in the Landscape of Bulgaria’s Rhodope Mountains”

Initiative of UNDP and the MAF (MAFS)

Funded by the Global Environment Facility



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Project Philosophy

Economic development of the region

Integrated approach

Biodiversity conservation



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Project goal

Integration of the aims linked with the biodiversity conservation into nature resource management, policies and practices for economic development in Eastern and Western Rhodopes while supporting the environmental sustainable development of the region

Project activities

- Raising public awareness on nature conservation issues;
- Broaden the baseline knowledge of the regions habitats and species;
- Undertake specific small scale conservation actions;
- Integrate biodiversity conservation into economic development policy, practices and planning;
- Pilot alternative livelihood approaches (in addition to traditional regional economic activities) ;
- Provide entrepreneurship training and small business support to stakeholders;
- Identify funding mechanisms to enable people to finance alternative livelihood entrepreneurship.



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Sustainable use of biodiversity

- Identification of main sectors utilizing biodiversity assets (project-wise)
Forestry, Agriculture, Tourism
- Distribution of responsibilities for planning and control
Municipality authorities, Governmental agencies, District authorities, Ministries
- Rhodope Project and the Integration of biodiversity conservation concern in planning process

Surveys (*socioeconomic, biodiversity, nature resources and services etc.*)

Trainings (*focused on sustainable use of biodiversity in the three main sectors plus specialized*)

Document preparation/support (*manuals, guidelines, charters etc.*)

Services and data provision (*distribution of biodiversity data, GIS data, expert help*)

- **Protected areas management**

Establishment of new protected areas, development of Management plans



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Project intervention targeting the organic agriculture as a tool for biodiversity conservation

Identification of the issues and weaknesses in the sector of organic agriculture

Problems: scarce information and lack of capacity at local level, lack of funding and initiative

Activity: 2005. A database with national publications regarding organic agriculture is prepared

Activity: 2006. At municipality policy level are revised and updated 8 Municipality Strategic Development plans with regard to biodiversity conservation and agriculture

Activity: 2006-2007. Initiation of regional training seminars on organic agriculture throughout the Rhodopes

Activity: 2006-2007. Detailed survey on all farms keeping indigenous breeds in the region

Activity: 2007. Practical trainings on “Management of organic farm”

Activity: 2007. A series of trainings on Agro-ecology and preparation of projects for funding (PDRA)

Activity: 2007-2008. A Programme for Demonstrational Projects launched by Rhodope Project (300 000 USD). 6 project funded directly related to organic farming

Activity: 2008. Due to the growing interest additional trainings on Agro-ecology and organic farming are organized

Activity: 2008. Study tour for farmers from Rhodopes to 5 organic farms in Bulgaria

Activity: 2009. Two model farms keeping indigenous breeds supported to develop business plans



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Programme for Demonstration Projects - PDP

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE – supported activities

- **Initiation of organic agriculture;**
- **Conservation and restoration of rare and indigenous breeds;**
- **Development of products and services diversifying the activity of the farms;**
- **Development of Agri-environment plans and support for their implementation;**
- **Maintenance and management of pastures by grazing and renewal of withering agricultural practices;**
- **Wild herbs – cultivation, processing and marketing;**
- **Development of new products linked with eco-tourism.**



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PDP Projects – case study 1

Pilot farm for production of organic honey – Nedelino

Aim

Establishment of apiary and cultivation of herbs for
production of organic bee honey

Results

- Established apiary with 20 bee hives kept according to the requirements in organic manner
- A plantation of 0.2 ha is established with oregano and mint to act as a feeding ground
- Certification of the bee keeping and organic honey production
- Prepared brochure advertising the organic honey production





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PDP Projects – case study 2

Establishment of karakachan sheep herd aiming at conservation and restoration of rare traditional for the region breed - Yagodina

Aim

To integrate activities toward biodiversity conservation in central Rhodopes

Results

- Established herd with 120 karakachan sheep
- Increased the areas target managed for biodiversity conservation
- Prepared Agro-environment plan for sustainable use of the pastures in the region of Yagodina
- A strategy for linking the farm products with alternative forms of tourism is developed





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PDP Projects – case study 3

Conservation of the population of indigenous breed – Rhodopean short-horned cow in eastern Rhodopes - Madzharovo

Results

- Established herd with 20 short-horned cows (certified) and a barn following the old traditions
- Increased the areas target managed for biodiversity conservation - 20 ha
- Prepared Agro-environment plan
- An open farm day is organized and the results are promoted among 40 farmers





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PDP Projects – case study 4

Model farm for cultivation of organic Aronia - Plovdivci

Aim

Setting a model farm for cultivation of organic Aronia

Results

- Increased area for cultivation of Aronia
- Certified organic cultivation
- Increased interest among local farmers for cultivating organic products
- Increased production of organic Aronia for the market





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PDP Projects – case study 5

Small farm in the valley - Madzharovo

Aim

**Development of organic agriculture and
diversification of products in a family farm**

Results

- **Certified agriculture land and started organic agriculture at a family farm**
- **Establishment of walnut plantation, fence with dog-roses and brambles and area sown with alfalfa**
- **Two karakachan horses with all needed harnesses are acquired for the farm**





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PDP Projects – case study 6

Cultivation of alfalfa - Madzharovo

Aim

To find alternative of tobacco cultivation

Results

- **A family has guaranteed income for 4 years from organic agriculture**
- **Produced 25 000 kg of alfalfa**
- **Increased land managed in organic way with 5 ha**



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Concluding remarks

- **Organic agriculture can be successfully developed in the mountainous areas of Bulgaria**
- **Organic agriculture can contribute to sustainable use of land and biodiversity conservation**
- **Organic agriculture is an option for diversification of the sources of income for local people, especially when linking it with alternative forms of tourism**
- **Organic agriculture can be used as substitute of not feasible agriculture practices**

Further steps

- **Efforts to popularize the organic farming as income generation practice is still needed**
- **Capacity building should be continued**
- **Qualitative marketing studies and activities should accomplish all other efforts**
- **Efforts to establish a network of organic farmers could also be very beneficial**

The background of the slide is a scenic landscape. The top portion shows a range of mountains with a prominent peak, covered in dense green forests, under a clear sky. The bottom portion shows rolling green hills, also covered in vegetation, under a hazy, light sky.

Thank you for your attention!

For more information

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