CHILDREN AND YOUTH MAJOR GROUP TO UNEP

Submission for the Eastern Europe Regional Consultation on Nature-Based Solutions
Children and Youth Major Group
July 2023

Children and Youth Major Group submission to the intergovernmental consultation following up on the UNEA Resolution 5/5 (UNEP/EA.5/Res.5) on Nature-based Solutions in reply to the co-chairs' invitation *to provide input in relation to the overall aim of the intergovernmental consultations and the three specific tasks for the consultations specified in the resolution.* CYMG presents its contributions to the following points:

1. The overall aim of the intergovernmental consultations
2. Examples of best practices

The overall aim of the intergovernmental consultations

The Children and Youth Major Group is pleased to take part in the consultations happening for this region, as a way to share the vision of the global youth on what we can do to contribute to the implementation of nature-based solutions in solving/mitigating the effects of the climate change in the natural world and human societies. We share the vision that young people should also be considered when thinking about nature-based solutions since we can contribute to the discussion around the topic by sharing our novel ideas and the projects that young people have done.

We at CYMG believe that nature-based solutions can be a great tool in achieving some of the Sustainable Development Goals, but that would only work if there is cooperation (whether multilateral or bilateral) between Member States and other Stakeholders. We also stand for our common philosophy that nature-based solutions should be implemented taking into account the welfare of the communities most affected by the triple planetary crisis, in order to best benefit them.

This is a compilation list of projects that utilize nature-based solutions as wary to combat the consequences of the climate crisis, and for this submission, we compiled two examples from the Eastern Europe region. For each one, we have written a summary of their goals and development process as well as their outcomes and sources of finance.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH MAJOR GROUP TO UNEP

Examples of best practices

Eastern Europe

Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, and Moldova

The Lower Danube green corridor project is a collaboration between Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, and Moldova to create a green corridor along the entire 1,000+ km stretch of the Lower Danube River in order to reduce the risk of major flooding events and bolster local economies.

Nature-based Intervention:

- The Lower Danube green corridor project was formed as an agreement between the governments of Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, and Moldova to restore 224,000 hectares of floodplain as part of a broader green corridor which would include a preserved area of 935,000 hectares along the Lower Danube river. As of 2020, more than 60,000 hectares of floodplains have been restored. Alongside this restoration, there have been dike removals along the river to allow for it to resume its natural flow patterns and causing over 750 hectares of land to naturally return to a flooded state. Invasive plants were also an issue along the river, so investments were made to clear these plants and traditional cattle breeds were brought in to graze the invasive plants. Native vegetation was also planted along the corridor with tens of thousands of native trees planted along the river and areas created for natural forest regeneration.

Overview of context and outcomes:

- The lower Danube River is an important regional river that has faced large-scale degradation over the last century. The river had been cut-off from three-quarters of its natural floodplains due to the construction of dikes which has led to large changes in its flow course. This puts the region at greater risk as it is highly prone to flooding and this is likely to be exacerbated by climate change. Gravel extraction, dredging, and dam construction along the river have also led to lower water tables in nearby agricultural lands and the erosion of the riverbed. The river has also experienced high levels of eutrophication due to agricultural run-off.

Climate change mitigation:

- Whilst no mitigation outcomes are reported, the large-scale forest regeneration and tree planting programs likely lead to an increase in carbon sequestration.

Adaptation:

- The project has worked to reduce flood vulnerability faced by communities along the river by decommissioning underperforming flood protection dikes and restoring floodplains. These restored landscapes are reportedly a more successful mechanism of floodwater retention and allow for overall lower infrastructure maintenance costs. During the 2013 flooding event on the Danube River, the lower Danube reportedly did not flood despite the higher-than-normal water levels. The landscape reportedly also helps with drought management by holding and slowly releasing a larger volume of water.

Ecosystem health:

- The project has worked to improve habitat extent and habitat quality along the river. This is vitally important as there have been 5,137 species reportedly identified along this stretch of the river. The landscape is also reportedly a habitat for some of Europe's rarest fish, such as the five species of sturgeon which call the river home. This includes the critically endangered beluga sturgeon (*Huso huso*) which travels up the river to spawn. This landscape is also vital for birds with 331 species utilizing the river and 90% of the world's Red-breasted geese (*Branta ruficollis*) living here. The restoration of natural river vegetation and restoration of the floodplain is also reportedly helping recharge groundwater resources and purify the water in the river.

Socioeconomic outcomes:

- The river is a highly important resource for the 29 million people who live in the basin. The improved river landscape reportedly had benefits for the collection of natural resources such as fish and reeds through the improved habitat quality. The landscape also reportedly generates €140,000 in tourism revenue annually. The community received increased flood protection which reportedly reduced the cost of environmental damage to nearby residents. The WWF estimates that the net value of the restored floodplain and river amounts to €111.8 million per year.

Finance:

- The main funders of the project so far have been the WWF, national governments, the EU, and the business sector. The estimated cost of completing the entire restoration is 183 million euros.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH MAJOR GROUP TO UNEP

Republic of Moldova

The Moldova Soil Conservation Project (National Programme) focuses on restoring degraded lands across the country through wide-scale reforestation efforts covering 20.3 thousand ha of previously degraded lands.

Nature-based Intervention:

- The project focused on using reforestation and afforestation to repair degraded lands and vulnerable soils. This included the return of 20.3 thousand ha of previously degraded lands back into general production. The implementation of this program involved working with a network of 383 communities and 23 forest enterprises within the country. Over 60% of the project sites are owned by local communities and plating took place at 2,421 different project locations. The project also opens up the use of the forests for sustainable timber harvesting and the harvesting of non-wood forest products in order to bolster local livelihood outcomes. In areas that are highly degraded the project utilized fast-growing tree species such as *Robinia pseudoacacia* and *Gleditschia triachantos* to stabilize the soil and once the landscape has recovered the species can be harvested and replaced with native oak and ash.

Overview of context and outcomes:

- Moldova faces widespread risks from land degradation and soil erosion. More than 50% of the country's territory is located on land which has an incline making it vulnerable to erosion and gully formation. The erosion risk is widespread and more than 80,000 ha of land have been destroyed by the formation of 6,200 ravines. A goal of the project was to support Moldova’s commitments to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol mechanisms.

Climate change mitigation:

- The project is reportedly estimated to have 3.6 million tons of CO2 reductions over a 20-year time span. It is reportedly estimated that the project has a net anthropogenic GHG removal impact of 179.200 tons of CO2 annually. During the time span of 2004-2009, it is reported that 515 thousand tons of CO2 were sequestered during the project.

Adaptation:

- The project utilizes reforestation on marginal lands to reportedly stop soil erosion on these degraded hillsides. The root systems of the forest also reportedly help prevent landslides which were increased in likelihood due to the previously unstable soil conditions.

Ecosystem health:

- The restoration efforts reportedly improve the habitat quality and the amount of aboveground biomass found within the ecosystem.

Socioeconomic outcomes:

- The large-scale forest restoration reportedly helps to increase local community access to supplies of fuel wood, timber, and non-timber products (such as medicinal herbs and hunting), which can all be utilized by the local community to support their livelihoods. The community reportedly harvests 70,000 m3 of wood biomass annually and the management of the forests and replanting operations have created both temporary and permanent jobs.

Finance:

- The 20-year financing need reported by the program is 19 million USD, 80% of which was utilized in the first five years to conduct large-scale planting. They also practice the sale of carbon credits with 1.9 million tons of carbon already contracted to World Bank Funds, 1.3 tons contracted to Prototype Carbon Fund, and 0.6 tons contracted to the BioCarbon Fund. For the 2004-2017 crediting period, it is reportedly estimated that the project will generate $7 million.