

Press release

Armenia Celebrates May 22 International Day of Biodiversity

Contributing to the celebration of the **May 22 - International Day for Biodiversity (IDB)** and in the framework of the nationwide 2010 campaign “Exploring Biodiversity of Rivers and Streamlets in Armenia”, the GTZ-SMB Programme and the RA Ministry of Nature Protection organized an event with a focus on Armenia’s unique biodiversity. This special occasion was used to create awareness of the importance of biodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources. The celebration of the IDB began with a press conference during which the speakers from the RA Ministry of Nature Protection, National Institute of Education of the RA Ministry of Education and Science and GTZ-SMB Programme in Armenia presented the main concept and idea of the IDB and stressed the need of raising awareness about biodiversity issues, and especially among the young generation. After the press conference, the guests and journalists joined in an entertaining eco-excursion to Kasakh riverside (Ashtarak Gorge) where pupils from Yerevan’s four schools presented a model example of exploring biodiversity and assessing water quality in particular locations along the river-stream, as well as organized short open-air environmental performance.

The United Nations announced **2010** as the **International Year of Biodiversity**. Throughout the year, governments and NGOs of many countries worldwide were launching special events and activities to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity and to stress its importance for our lives. To contribute to the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity, the GTZ-Sustainable Management of Biodiversity (SMB) Programme in Armenia in cooperation with its partners – the RA Ministry of Nature Protection and RA Ministry of Education and Science, as well as several Armenian and International organizations, carried out an unprecedented environmental education and awareness creation campaign entitled “**Exploring Biodiversity in Rivers and Streamlets of Armenia**”. The campaign was designed to increase awareness about rivers and streamlets as living ecosystems focusing on 9-15 year-old pupils of the RA schools and young members of eco-clubs.

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In April-May of 2010, a total of 120 school-teachers from Armenia's different regions have been trained on the ecology and biodiversity of rivers, as well as on modern pedagogic methods and approaches for adding practical lessons in nature to their usual classroom lectures. The trained teachers gained necessary qualification to conduct river excursions with their classes and, in this way, include outdoor activities in their traditional indoor lessons. That significantly increased efficiency of biology lessons and helped to create better understanding of the value of biodiversity. Pupils understood that rivers are living ecosystems which drain Armenia like blood vessels drain our bodies, and that their ecological state reflects the healthiness of our environment. Based on the observed biodiversity species (micro-invertebrates), students were able to decide on how natural the water body was.

In general, the campaign was designed to motivate and educate young people – tomorrow's environmental leaders and advocates – on the need of taking certain actions for the preservation of biodiversity. Moreover, the initiative matched with the RA government's recently updated "Strategic Program for Ecological Education" which is implemented by the RA Ministry of Nature Protection and the RA Ministry of Education and Science. The paper includes all major measures to be taken to EE in the country and to increase public awareness on environmental issues, especially among its young population.

At present, the Republic of Armenia puts efforts in realizing various projects aimed at sustainable use and management of nature resources. The country faces significant challenges in order to promote and improve Ecological/Environmental Education (EE) and Awareness Creation in the country. The introduction of environment into the state education system, general EE approaches and training are considered priority directions. Armenia joined the International Convention on Biological Diversity in 1993 and took the commitment to implement the CBD which is demonstrated through the improvement and harmonization of existing environmental laws, as well as by setting regulations in accordance with the international standards.

During the past years, Armenia has managed to expand and develop international cooperation, particularly in the field of environmental protection. However, the pressure on the natural resources in South Caucasus countries is still high and is accelerating the destruction of biodiversity which in many areas is the main source of income of rural



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population. For this, development cooperation works towards improvement of conditions for the conservation of biodiversity and local livelihoods. Therefore, the governments of the Republic of Armenia and the Federal Republic of Germany have started cooperation on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in Armenia.

Back in 1992, the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) recognized the important role of education and public awareness in the quest to achieve sustainable development. The Parties to the CBD reinforced the importance of public education and awareness as instruments to achieve the three main objectives of the convention, which are the: conservation, sustainable use, access and equitable sharing of the benefits from the use of genetic resources.

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