

Establishing a Junior Ranger Group in Ismayilli District, Azerbaijan

Transfer project in the framework of the Klaus Toepfer Fellowship Programme

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Executive Summary

The transfer project “Establishing a Junior Ranger Group in Ismayill District, Azerbaijan” was aimed at educating and inspiring selected young people (aged 10-17) to become potential nature conservationists and leaders engaged in fostering positive changes in the conservation of biodiversity in Azerbaijan. The initiative of proposing the concept of junior rangers and formation of a pilot group in Ismayill was the first of its kind in the country. According to discussions with partners, there were no junior ranger groups functioning in the country before, nor initiatives taken previously to establish such a programme. However, there are a few groups and associations of children with a similar interest such as the Azerbaijan Scout Association (under tutorship of the Ministry of Youth and Sport), junior forester group, etc.

Referring to various reports on biodiversity, unsustainable economic use of biodiversity, particularly in protected areas, has tended to be seen as a threat to nature and a loss of biodiversity. One of the main reasons of this problem was defined as the lack of public awareness. The public awareness shall be increased at different levels, particularly at school level. It is of especial importance to provide effective trainings and awareness compaigns for young people to achive increasing positive changes in the future. Young people must know the importance of nature conservation and sustainable resource use. They must feel the responsibility for making individual contributions to protecting the environment. Therefore, special emphasis was put on increasing environmental awareness and conservation enthusiasm of junior rangers and promoting ecosystem services.

In order to establish a well organised junior ranger group, 20 inspired schoolchildren, who had distinguished leadership potential and motivation to learn the environmental topics, were selected from Ismayill City School 1. The identified group of junior rangers was trained on varios topics such as the importance of biodiversity, the concept of ecosystem services, functions of protected areas, roles and functions of birds, reptiles, insects, etc. Moreover, the leadership skills of junior rangers were strengthened through interactive games and outdoor activities. Special efforts were taken to induce a sense of individual responsibility of junior rangers in environmental conservation initiatives and strengthen their inspiration to become potential leaders in this field. Through the above activities, the junior rangers were developed as nature-lovers with increased aspiration to become future conservationists, and their communication and coordination skills were improved.

The transfer project was implemented in Ismayilli District, located near the Shahdag National Park (Shahdagh NP – see Figure 1). The District of Ismayilli was selected as the outcomes

of the transfer project were expected to contribute to one of the anticipated results of the GIZ programme and therefore to seek the GIZ Programme assistance to cover operational costs. On the other hand, this choice enabled the author to provide outdoor activities in cooperation with rangers in the adjacent national park. During the project, the junior rangers were taken to various sites of the Shahdagh NP and were informed about the objectives and functions of national parks (by rangers) as well as the values of biodiversity and ecosystems.

The transfer project was implemented in cooperation with the Ismayilli EEC as the relevant organization managing and implementing environmental education activities. The Ismayilli EEC provided administrative and logistical support in implementation of the transfer project.

The trained and enthusiastic junior rangers (hopefully some to be potential future conservationists) will contribute to the effectiveness of conservation measures in the longer run.