

Exploring the establishment of environmental resource centers for the promotion of environmental conservation on the Ustyurt Plateau, Uzbekistan & Kazakhstan

Transfer project in the framework of the Klaus Toepfer Fellowship Programme

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Executive summary

This report presents the initial findings of my Transfer Project aiming at assessing the need for and the feasibility of establishing environmental resource centers (ERC) on the Ustyurt Plateau in Kazakhstan.

The Ustyurt landscape is threatened by complex factors and there is currently only limited knowledge and understanding among local people of the value of biodiversity to their livelihoods and the laws, conventions, policies and agencies in place to protect it. For achieving long-term sustainable management of the Ustyurt landscape it is important to strengthen a local constituency and advocacy for biodiversity conservation. By increasing the visibility and knowledge of the Ustyurt landscape and the involvement of the civil society it is expected that local people will gain the information needed to understand what is at stake and it is hoped they realize the importance of their conservation.

The goal of my Transfer Project was to provide access to information and strengthen cultural identity in support of promoting environmental conservation. The objectives of my work were to i) assess the need for and ii) the feasibility of providing access to information in order to address environmental challenges facing the Ustyurt. With the aim to promote local sustainable development I explored opportunities for establishing Environmental Resource Centers (ERC) as a means of facilitating a change in knowledge that ultimately converts into a change of attitudes and behaviors towards environmental protection.

Key partners of my work were Fauna & Flora International (FFI), the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity of Kazakhstan (ACBK) and the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (SMEDA). FFI played a supervising role throughout my work and provided financial support to the field work. ACBK was consulted and closely involved in choosing the study sites and in preparation of the field trip. SMEDA was supporting the facilitation of my field work. My work would have not be possible with the support from the Forestry and Hunting Committee, Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

As part of a preparation process of exploring the possibility of establishing ERC in villages close to the Ustyurt a desk study of existing data and available facts of

the present situation of local communities was conducted. Subsequent informal discussions were held with various groups from two villages in Kazakhstan ranging from administration officers, farmers through to teachers, youth, retired elders and business-people.

The study revealed a strong dependence of rural villagers on informal, interpersonal information providers, which stem from the absence of formal information systems they can resort to when they need information. Resource centers should create national and local ownership and should be established in conjunction with rural economic and employment development initiatives. By this we hope to ensure the resource centers outputs and activities will continue beyond this project either funded by donors or by the government as part of their own programs and evolve independently when the project ends.

The field trip was a good way to get a better understanding of local people and local practice in Bosoy and Oimaut villages.