

Developing an environmental education programme in Turkmenistan

Transfer project in the framework of the Klaus Toepfer Fellowship Programme

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Executive summary

Environmental education contributes to awareness raising and to strengthening motivation to act for the environment. Wild nature and environmental education cannot be divided. Every reasonable person (not only an ecologist) must know something (have at least a short contact) about the uncontrollable world living according to its own rules, known as Nature, since we all depend from it and we are all responsible for it.

The goal of the project has been the development of ecological education among schoolchildren of the coastal area and the formation of new views on biodiversity protection.

The wide range of biodiversity in coastal areas and the multitude of threats to this biodiversity demand complex approaches to conservation and coastal resource management. The creation of an ecological training center for school pupils in the coastal area, based on the nature museum of Khazar State Reserve, contributes to awareness raising and increasing participation of local communities in understanding and addressing conservation problems in their vicinity.

The educational approach of the project is based on the training principle of ecological outdoor education (in the field), through nature walks and field trips. Teaching young ecologists and their leaders concrete ways of research and nature conservation in natural conditions is the main idea of the training center.

The promotion and implementation of such education activities will be achieved by including environmental education programmes into the regular secondary school curricula as an optional course for schoolchildren of the 6-8 forms, by training teachers and by offering additional activities in the center. This approach was possible after intensive negotiation and collaboration between reserve staff and city department of education staff, city administration and other authorities. The collaboration has been made formal with an agreement signed.

During implementation of this project 30% of children in Turkmenistan's coastal area would be able to contact with and "research" real wild nature at least once or twice during his/her school years through adapting hands-on activities and thought-provoking games to illustrate ecological concepts. These activities might also attract volunteers to research work and have already increased visitor numbers to the Nature Museum (as a side effect). They might also help to attract additional means to Khazar State Reserve from interested organizations, state structures and sponsors.

The activities of the training center and related issues of wildlife management have been well covered by the periodical press due to efforts of the Khazar State Reserve. The press coverage of ecological problems has increased since.

Indirectly these activities shall help to raise the ecological knowledge and awareness of the local population. The ecological training center could help children to develop into adults who understand and care about the environment; nurtures their sense of wonder, imagination, and creativity; provides them with a sense of beauty, calm, and refuge in a sometimes frightening world; expands their intellectual development; to understand the interrelationship of all life. Today's children will be responsible for making decisions that will shape the health of the environment. To prepare them for such responsibilities, they need a sound environmental education as a foundation from which to make those decisions. The scope of the training center shall be widened to assist local communities to reduce and prevent overuse of the natural resources of the Caspian Sea. Some indicators are proposed to measure the impact of the educational activities on the public awareness and the behaviour of the local population.