

Unpacking the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, E-Workshop 2: Decarbonization and Biodiversity Pillars

Summary of Breakout Rooms Discussions

1. Effective integration of operations across geographical and institutional scales:

- Even though the pillars of the GAWB are interlinked, the thematic issues are often dealt with separately in distinct geographical areas and at different scales, even if managed within by one organisation.
- Effective integration is needed: typically, biodiversity considerations should be included by design in any intervention addressing decarbonisation, climate change effects, DRR and the like.
- As there are great similarities between the WB countries, thus regional approach would be important .
- Although there are international organisations (e.g. IUCN and RCC) still there is no adequate dialogue at the regional level and sharing of experiences between the countries

2. Addressing pillars equally

a. by avoiding artificial thematic segregation of thematic activities and earmarked funds

- The scope of GA is wide and countries are not able to address all the issues simultaneously . Therefore, it is important to take account of actions' co-benefits e.g. in landscape restoration , they need however to be better highlighted / promoted
 - e.g. Better (systemic) mainstreaming of biodiversity in on-going interventions and better monitoring and reporting could help to speed-up activities and improve harvesting of results.
 - E.g. 'the combination of benefits and costs' could be tested in 'sponge cities, that groups projects combining benefits (to start small but combine efforts).
 - e.g. developing systems bringing together costs and benefits of decarbonisation and/or biodiversity (BD) - Who to pay for it and how to ensure these funds are invested into environment (i.e. ecotaxes?)

b. by raising awareness

- Based on example of BD work in North Macedonia, mention of the tremendous importance of awareness raising, on-site interaction and planning participatory process for actions with the communities, to understand how much BD conservation is part of the solution to a number of challenges.
- Awareness raising and demonstrational activities are key, not forgetting the transboundary, multi-sectorial and transgenerational aspects of it.
- Much more could be done for Biodiversity in the Western Balkans, which actually is a Biodiversity hot spot of global significance.

- Strong local leadership, involvement of local and international experts to build up trust, that 'communities will be fine' and that solutions will be functional .

3. Combining relevant stakeholders and assign roles strategically

- Integration of the different stakeholders relevant to the issues at hand is a must.
- Typically, local authorities / municipalities should be supported as drivers of relevant pilot/demonstration interventions that can then be brought to scale.
- Often forgotten by design is the business sector who has strong effects on the progress of the GAWB, and in turn bears the implications of the EU legislation being approximated.
- Green Agenda strategy and action plan involves many ministries/bodies due to multi pillar approach. Who can be in the lead (and strong enough) to coordinate its implementation? Can one single ministry do it?
- Donor coordination (which is not primarily the donor's task) and overall monitoring and mapping of the needs of the Green Agenda needs to be strengthened, e.g. also through the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) at the regional level.
- Especially for Biodiversity, the work of all donors in the region is important, including the UN, even if the EU accession process seems to be an overall priority. Also the SDC could actually do more for biodiversity in their portfolio.

4. Harmonizing policies and legislations to adopt regional implementation of actions

- Across the WB economies, the legislation around the green agenda pillars in general is well advanced / up to modern standards: what is lagging is the effective implementation / enforcement of the provisions made.
- Yet, we need to make sure that the relevant sector policies are well harmonized in order not to undermine sector specific or broader common goals.
- Most important is policy review of all Green Agenda items, meaning that the countries – central and local governments - take responsibility.
- Sustainable financing mechanisms: quite a number of them are 'decentralized', which often does not fit with centralized structures. How to make sure that the funds flow back into the 'region'?

5. Translating guidance into robust practice

- The further promotion of the use of renewable energy and green energy transformation lacks sound prior assessment of the technologies and products brought in.