



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### FOR THE PROMOTION AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF FORESTS AND THEIR PRODUCTS WITHIN THE DRIN BASIN:

*The following recommendations draw from the Report “Strengthening the value chain of energy biomass in the Drin River Basin for a more sustainable management of forests, and related nexus implications”. The Report was prepared by CNVP (Connecting Natural Values & People Foundation) for the Phase II Nexus Assessment in the Drin basin in the framework of the “Promoting the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in South-eastern Europe, through the use of the Nexus approach” Project, funded by the Austrian Development Agency, implemented by Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean (GWP-Med) in partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The recommendations are structured around the themes of (i) Institutions; (ii) Information/Capacity Building; (iii) Instruments; (iv) Infrastructure and investments and (v) International cooperation, and include references to related objectives of the Drin Strategic Action Programme (SAP).*



#### INSTITUTIONS

- Sustainable management and use of natural resources is a prerequisite for the sustainable harvest of biomass. There is a direct relationship between natural resources, especially forests, and the provision of multiple ecosystem services, such as sufficient water and water quality. Institutions responsible for natural resources, for example the Ministries of the Environment and/or Forestry should ensure a proper regulative and legislative framework for the implementation and monitoring of sustainable use of natural resources (linked to SAP Goal 2, sub-objective 2.4).
- River Basin Management planning and implementation must be embedded in government structures at national and regional level, at natural resource management level and (rural) economic development, including international cooperation with counterparts within the basin.
- To address sustainable forest (and natural) resource management, a river basin approach is necessary for water and ecosystem management, including forests. This is required since the effects of unsustainable forest use or over exploitation have a direct impact on water quality and water availability and may lead to floods, erosion and related damages and costs throughout the basin (SAP Goal 2, sub-objective 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5)
- Establishment of standards for sustainable use of forest resources and wood pellets. For example through forest certification schemes (FSC or PEFC), chain of custody and product standards such as European Union standards on solid fuels including wood pellets (NEN-EN-ISO 17225-2 determines fuel quality classes and specifications of graded wood pellets for non-industrial and industrial use). North Macedonia has extensive experience in forest certification and chain of custody for PEFC.



#### INFORMATION/CAPACITY BUILDING

- Trainings on designing and implementing practices of sustainable forest management to ensure sustainable use of biomass and mitigation of potential harm to soil and water resources. Focus should be provided to all stakeholders involved, with specific attention to forest managers, but also farmers (men and women).
- Input should be provided by forestry experts to studies foreseen by the Drin Basin SAP on erosion hotspots, biodiversity trends, ecosystem services and in drafting respective management related recommendations (SAP Goal 2, Sub-Objectives 1.3, 1.5).
- Study on Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) opportunities within river basin approaches including schemes and practices. The case of Ulza Watershed in Albania, could be used as an example.
- Awareness raising campaigns for the benefits and applications of efficient and sustainable use of wood biomass (SAP Goal 2, Objective 4).



## INSTRUMENTS

- Create incentives for forest owners/managers for forest planting, especially in areas vulnerable to erosion particularly in the transboundary basin downstream in order to avoid damages by floods and transport of sediment.
- Launch pro-poor initiatives in the basin area to support households in obtaining timely seasoned firewood and avoid using fresh firewood for heating.
- Provide incentives for wood industries to produce economically beneficial wood products with longer lifespan, that contribute also to climate mitigation. Support the wood processing industry in developing develop construction wood such as cross laminated timber or furniture. Sustainable use of forests especially of wood products should not only focus on biomass, but address the total range of products as well we the entire forestry and wood industry sectors. Priority should be given to longer lasting products with higher value, which are more economically beneficial and contribute to climate mitigation, such as timber and construction wood, which keep carbon sequestered for a long period of time against biomass products that are often of a lower economic value and release carbon directly to the atmosphere. This action supports Chapter 15 on Energy of the EU acquis, in which renewable energy, including biomass, is supported.
- Efforts should be made to have suitable systems available for rural areas, including sufficient service and maintenance support as well as availability of processed biomass products locally at an affordable price.
- Establish Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) within river basin approaches to ensure sustainable natural resource management. For example, downstream water users paying for improved forest management or reforestation upstream.



## INFRASTRUCTURE AND INVESTMENTS

- With support through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) becoming soon available for 2021-2027 from the EU, priorities and operational rules at national level can be established in the Drin Riparians to support sustainable use of natural resources and biomass (in line with chapter 11 of the EU acquis on agriculture and rural development), that requires adequate administrative capacity of agricultural administrations, in particular for formulation, analysis, implementation, support payment and control of agricultural policy.
- In practical terms, measures could be designed to support (a) forest restoration and Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) practices (b) sustainable wood harvest practices for small forest holders, (c) SMEs to expand production of processed biomass products (pellets, woodchips, briquettes) for local consumers and related heating and/or combined heat and power systems, (d) investments by consumers for a switch from firewood to processed biomass products.
- Identify options for establishing cooperation with development and commercial banks for the provision of micro-credit options/soft loans for households, businesses and public organizations to shift into alternative heating fuels (e.g. pellets, briquettes) as market-based measures to reduce illegal forest exploitation listed in the Drin Basin SAP (Goal 2, Sub-Objectives 1.6).
- Value chain development for biomass should include a gender perspective to address the specific needs and opportunities of women and disadvantaged groups, in order to benefit from the biomass value chain but also to participate in it. This is in line with the EU acquis on agriculture and rural development (chapter 11) in which at agricultural market level, setting up of market mechanisms, including marketing standards, price reporting, quota management, producer organisations and public intervention are required.
- Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise establishment support mechanism is recommended within the biomass value chain to promote further development and use of these renewable energy sources. Support is required for processing, product development (pellets, briquettes, wood chips), trade and transport as well as for the energy and heating systems and/or combined heat power systems.
- Support for biomass production should not compete with agricultural crops, nor endanger preservation of forests with high biodiversity value.



## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

- Coordinating at regional level renewable energy transition, biomass markets, as well as wood and agro-products markets in general.
- Sustainable forest (natural) resource management should be properly integrated into national policies, as well as in regional cooperation and communication in the Drin River Basin countries.
- Clear interlinkages exist between the different spheres (natural resources, water, energy, food). Their link to climate change needs to be translated, defined and agreed among relevant sectors/stakeholders at regional, national and local level to concrete actions in order to enable an environment for safeguarding the ecosystem services through the implementation of sustainable forest (natural) resource management.

