

# Biosphere Reserves as model regions for sustainable development – Three Alazani Biosphere Reserve Georgia

## Context

The Caucasus is identified as one of the 36 "Global Biodiversity Hotspots," facing threats such as excessive logging, overgrazing, poaching, landscape fragmentation, infrastructure development, and pollution. Climate change affects the region additionally and the vulnerability towards climate change and the need for adaptation have been recognised as important topics. The development of the established Three Alazani Biosphere Reserve and the implementation of related objectives and supporting activities is a priority for the Ministry of the Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (MEPA).

In three previous project phases, the establishment of the first Biosphere Reserve in Georgia commenced with a feasibility study, followed by a capacity-building phase, and concluded with a project to support the nomination process of the Three Alazani Rivers Biosphere Reserve in Georgia. Through the approval of the nomination by the International Coordinating Council of UNESCO's Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme, the Biosphere Reserve successfully became part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves (WNBR) in June 2022. The Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program is an intergovernmental scientific initiative seeking to establish a scientific foundation for improving the connection between people and their environments. By integrating natural and social sciences, MAB aims to enhance human livelihoods, protect ecosystems, and encourage innovative, culturally, and environmentally sustainable approaches to economic development.

At its core, the biosphere reserve concept serves as a model for sustainable development, leveraging the region's rich biodiversity and distinctive zones, including core, and transition areas. The establishment of a biosphere reserve emphasises the urgent need to adapt to climate change, especially in regions such as Kakheti. A biosphere reserve not only preserves the rich natural and cultural heritage and traditional forms of land use but is also a promising tool for promoting and testing measures and strategies and strengthening the resilience of the endangered Kakheti region. Biosphere reserves support socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable regional development.

By including nature conservation measures and the promotion of sustainable land use practices they contribute to halting the loss of biodiversity. Biosphere reserves can also serve in protecting the natural areas and old cultural landscapes of Georgia with their unique biodiversity which is increasingly threatened by an unsustainable use of resources and climate change.

Project title	Policy Dialogue and Knowledge Management on Climate Protection Strategies (DIAPOL-CE).
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV)
Implementing organization	Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus (RECC), Michael Succow Foundation (MSF), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Political partner	Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (MEPA)
Countries	Georgia, Mongolia, Oman, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda, and other selected countries
Overall term	03/2014 – 06/2025



## Objectives

Since June 2022, two biosphere reserves in Georgia – Three Alazani and Dedoplistskaro Biosphere Reserves – got adopted officially by UNESCO. DIAPOL-CE supports the Georgian MEPA with the development and further implementation of the Three Alazani Biosphere Reserve.

This will be achieved by:

- Supporting the establishment of a gender-responsive biosphere reserve management body that gets operationalised.

- Strengthening the capacities of the management body and key partners concerning specific topics and challenges regarding biosphere reserves development and operation as well as promoting knowledge sharing and exchange between key stakeholders.
- Capacity development of staff of the biosphere reserve and protected areas, awareness raising and branding of Three Alazani Biosphere Reserve, and providing technical advice on the opportunities and challenges for climate adaptation in Georgia.
- Strengthening transboundary knowledge exchange with staff of near border protected areas and responsible national institutions.
- Supporting local initiatives of the Three Alazani Biosphere Reserve via a Small Grants Program – the funding scheme shall build synergies among government partners, private sector, and civil society organisations to raise awareness and mobilise support for biodiversity and natural climate protection in Georgia.

## Approach

DIAPOL-CE supports the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (MEPA) in the further establishment and development of the Biosphere Reserve Three Alazani due to the missing capacities in the country and lack of previous experience in the practical implementation of the MAB concept. The Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus (RECC) and the Michael-Succow Foundation are supporting the process as implementing partners due to their regional anchorage and experience. A GIZ advisor in Georgia is coordinating and communicating the workstreams towards MEPA and governmental stakeholders.



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Berlin, 2024

## And beyond...

Biosphere reserves are relatively new to Georgia and their management is not yet legally stipulated. Although an overarching law on protected areas exist, it does not fully incorporate biosphere reserve issues. The forthcoming Law on Biodiversity (not yet approved) encompasses biosphere reserve development but is only now being heard in the parliament. Strengthening the legal framework and establishing a biosphere reserve management body with participatory planning approaches ensures that land tenure rights are recognised and protected. Clear laws and policies help delineate responsibilities and rights among different stakeholders, reducing conflicts over land and reinforcing land tenure rights.

The establishment of the Three Alazani Biosphere Reserve contributes to the objectives and principles of the three Rio Conventions (UNFCCC, CBD, UNCCD) by mitigating climate change, conserving biodiversity, preventing land degradation, and promoting sustainable land use practices. Among others, Three Alazani is of particular importance in terms of erosion control and contributing towards land degradation neutrality by promoting sustainable pasture management.

Three Alazani offers a great potential for conserving and enhancing traditional knowledge and practices of local communities to better align them with CBD goals. The main economic activity in the biosphere reserve is agriculture and pastoralism/transhumance. Transhumance describes a cyclical, annual movement of livestock between distinctive rangelands to exploit their seasonal growth. Mobile pastoralism can be seen as an important but declining element of many biosphere reserves as well as European cultural tradition. The transhumant livestock farming system is threatened on a regional scale owing to various reasons, e.g., due to unclear land tenure rights, conflicting land use, and an ongoing privatization of land. The established biosphere reserve will help to revive and develop historical practices that can be shared on a regional scale and support the sustainable socio-economic development of the whole area. Empowered by the Law on Biodiversity, communities with recognised tenure rights would be more likely to engage in sustainable practices, ensuring the long-term availability of these resources.



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