Moldova’s forest resources are modest – covering only 10% of the whole territory. The State Forest Agency “Moldsilva” manages the majority of forested land, while the rest is administered by local governments and only a small part is privately-owned. Not only are forests home to great biodiversity (80% of the country’s protected area network is on forest land), they are also essential to local communities for fuel and domestic use. According to data, 40% of forest growth is used annually and the consumption of wood is primarily linked to heating. The effects of unsustainable forest management and illegal activities include: significant loss of revenue for the forestry sector and, more importantly, for rural communities; degradation of the environment and forest ecosystems; loss of biodiversity; and loss of carbon stocks, which further exacerbates the effects of climate change on rural communities.

Illegal logging is considered a major problem in the forestry sector. Since the mid-1990s, the Government of Moldova has approved a series of special policies and regulatory documents on forestry. The Parliament of Moldova has adopted several decisions and amendments to existing laws on the prevention and combating of illegal logging. One of the main factors in illegal logging is the lack of legal provisions for the forests administered by local governments in the country’s Forest Code.

The Program

As a parallel process to the development of a Moldovan National Action Plan relating to forest resources, the ENPI FLEG Program was established to improve governance structures and to strengthen sustainable forest management practices. The Program focuses on:

- Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) training (geographic information systems, digital forest mapping, database usage) for forestry staff (governmental, community level, private), local authorities, judiciary bodies, customs officers;
- Capacity building for forest management planning at community level;
- Legislative analysis with the intent of improving forest legislation;
- Analytical studies (real consumption of wood, illegal logging) and socio-economic impact of inefficient forest management practices on local communities;
- Information and communication campaigns with key audiences (government, local communities, private sector, NGOs).
An analytical study on wood consumption revealed that the needs of local authorities for wood products in the country are currently not met and demand is on the increase. Although according to official statistics the share of the forestry sector used for energy purposes is rather low, Moldova’s population consumes large volumes of wood for heating which are several times higher than the authorized harvesting quotas. Preliminary data appears to indicate that most fuel-wood comes from illegal logging. Another study is currently assessing illegal logging and its impact on local communities. Preliminary results reveal a rate of illegal logging ranging from 5.5 cubic meters per 1000 hectares in forest land managed by “Moldsilva” compared to 114.3 cubic meters per 1000 hectares in community forests managed by local authorities. However, actual timber volumes and forests illegally logged could be significantly higher, with the most vulnerable being community forests.

The ENPI FLEG team closely cooperates with the Moldovan NGO community. The public forest association “Silva-Mileniu III” is developing training materials for creating and using databases and geographic information systems (GIS) which will be useful for FLEG. They are also developing digital forest maps to support sustainability assessments of logging practices. The environmental NGO “Eco-Spectru” will conduct a community forest management planning study in several districts of Moldova. They are also organizing several workshops with local communities dependent on forests, and will provide local authorities with educational / training materials on forest management planning (47 studies and 94 maps). The NGO Ecological Society “Biotica” was engaged to strengthen institutional and human capacities of entities subordinate to the Forest Agency Moldsilva (ICAS, nature reserves, forestry units).”

On 7th December 2010 the ENPI FLEG team in cooperation with the EU Delegation to Moldova, the ENPI Info centre, and PARC Communication Agency organized the event “Moldovan forests: reality, problems, solutions” at the Moldovan State University. The event was part of a road show which aimed to draw attention to forests, the application of legal provisions and forest sector management, citizens’ access to information on the legal use of forest resources and European Union actions oriented to forest protection and management.