Background

Forests cover 17.5% of the Ukrainian territory measuring 603.5 thousand square kilometers. Over the past decade, the forestry sector has expanded and public awareness has also increased yet there are scarcer wood resources in the country. Negative factors such as illegal logging and illegal timber trade pose a serious danger to forests impacting not only the economy but also the international image of the country. Despite optimistic official statistics, practically no coordinated efforts have been taken to measure legal violations and resulting damages, or to identify the root causes of these problems, nor to develop joint action plans aimed at rectifying the situation.

The recently adopted Forest Code (2006) and the concept of reforming and developing forestry in the Ukraine (2006) did not succeed in bringing quick positive results. Frequent forestry violations and crimes persist. An administrative reform which encompasses forest management is underway. Given a host of pressing problems in the Ukrainian forest sector, the successful implementation of the administrative forestry reform along with other relevant structural changes would largely depend on the positive results of international projects implemented in Ukraine, with the ENPI FLEG Program being a key support for the country’s forest sector.

The Program

The overall national objectives of the ENPI FLEG Program in Ukraine are:

- Develop, test and introduce an effective mechanism for public participation in the forest management decision-making process;
- Develop an efficient communication strategy and information facilities for the Ukrainian forestry sector;
- Promote the Program’s results and outreach, especially among the population directly influenced by forest problems;
- Increase awareness and enhance the commitment of stakeholders to the Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (FLEG) process.

From the very beginning of the ENPI FLEG Program in the Ukraine, a strong cooperation framework has been developed with environmental NGOs in the country. Active cooperation with leading Ukrainian sociologists resulted in a number of important, and quite often unique, studies primarily on Ukrainian forest laws and relevant national regulations, and sociological surveys of local populations and small businesses on legal access to timber and other forest resources. Continuous interest in the ENPI FLEG Program in Ukraine by the media culminated in a number of articles being published in national newspapers and a TV clip aired on the National TV Channel.
The issue of **public participation and access to information on forest management** was the subject of an analysis carried out in the country. Results showed that the main sources of forestry information are experts, self research and the internet. The press, television, and especially radios do not have proper capacity in this sector. The analysis prompted a number of recommendations submitted to the State Forestry Committee: more attention should be given to the development, functioning and contents of the official websites of the State Forestry Committee and its departments; a regulation should be developed for efficient provision of written information on forestry issues; and systems ensuring effective involvement of the public and local communities in the decision-making process on forest management are needed.

On 12 November 2010, the Ukrainian Green Cross Society, an ENPI FLEG partner, organized a scientific workshop on the **social and economic consequences of ineffective forest management on local communities**. Special attention was paid to the problems of illegal felling, and in particular to social and economic factors of illegal activities in the field of forest resource use. Other issues such as the potential legalization of illegal sawmills through certification; incentives for the sustainable use of forest resources by local populations; and the legal aspects of natural afforestation of abandoned lands were tackled. About 50 specialists representing local self-governing bodies, the forest sector, science, education, environmental NGOs, and mass media participated in the workshop.

A **poll on forest management** was conducted by the Center for Social and Marketing Research “SOCIS” among the local population. Around 1,200 respondents representing the rural adult population were interviewed in a number of districts in June 2010. The results were: 60% of respondents believe it is necessary to increase liability for illegal tree felling in order to make improvements in forest management, timber harvesting and sales; 41% think that only a small number of cases of illegal tree felling are disclosed in their area while the rest of such cases are concealed; 5% think that it is necessary to privatize forests and transfer them to private owners to ensure better management efficiency. These outcomes will be further used in the planning and preparation of future ENPI FLEG activities.