

***“Supporting Small Forest Holders in the Balkan countries as Drivers for the Development of Forest Certification schemes”***

REFORD with its member organisations is partner in the project ***“Supporting Small Forest Holders in the Balkan countries as Drivers for the Development of Forest Certification schemes”***, together with Connecting natural values and people foundation – CNVP as lead applicant in the project. The duration of the project is from September 2016 till December 2017; one part of the project activities are financed by the **PEFC Collaboration Fund and the other one are from Food and Agriculture Organization – FAO**

***The project objective*** is to increase the knowledge and to support initiatives on forest certification of forest actors in the Balkans including assuring the interest of small forest holders through sharing of experiences and cooperation.

Through sharing of experiences the project will secure ***increased learning*** among forest actors on the Balkans. Experiences that are obtained in Macedonia from the ongoing development of national forest certification scheme according to PEFC and from the recently implemented project in Montenegro on drafting SFM criteria will allow forest actors from the region, especially small forest holders from non EU countries (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) to learn about the process of development of national scheme. Using the experience of partners that went through the process will encourage initiation of processes in other countries. The system documents development and drafting of criteria for SFM is a time consuming process. Similarities of forest management practices will be used as starting point in sharing SFM criteria and national scheme documents from one country to other countries through the REFORD - network of family forest owners associations in the Balkan.

***Improved cooperation and facilitation*** among forest actors through PEFC certification processes is foreseen in the project. The project will facilitate sharing of experiences in forest certification from the Balkan countries, identifying opportunities, obstacles and future steps, promote cooperation and providing assistance to forest actors, especially small forest holders in different Balkan countries to start the process for forest certification in places where a positive dynamic is available. The project will provide support where the response is positive through drafting an action plan for development of forest certification scheme, establishing the initiative group as well as coaching to forest actors engaged.

The REFORD network, a regional network representing family forest in the Balkan, will be used to provide ***connection of forest actors from the Balkans***. REFORD network is serving as platform for sharing experiences, joint learning and lobbying and representation for the small forest holders from the region. CNVP foundation will provide overall project lead, expert knowledge and experience on forest certification.

***Activities foreseen in the project are:***

- Initiation of the PEFC forest certification process will be secured through conduction of REFORD’s network meeting where family forest associations from the Balkan region will define the steps to be taken and forest actors to be engaged in their countries.

- Forest certification in-depth awareness raising events and meetings for presentation of PEFC certification rules and procedures will be provided through the REFORD network and CNVP engagement. A number of awareness and promotional events on national level will be organized at Balkan countries (initially in Croatia, Bulgaria and Serbia) where forest actors will learn in more detail about PEFC certification rules and procedures, with the aim to help them identify the need and opportunities for forest certification.
- Identification of opportunities and bottlenecks for forest certification in the Balkan countries will be elaborated from the results of research conducted by REFORD and CNVP. In all countries where REFORD has member organizations one methodology will be applied: web questionnaires, interviews with key stakeholders and desk research. That will provide identification of interest and level of support to forest certification processes.
- Regional event for sharing of experiences in forest certification and joint reflection for a way forward will be organized in Tirana, Albania. The event will serve to present and discuss on the country findings from the previous action and conclude on the next steps forward to forest certification.

Support to initiatives on national level on creation of work groups in the Balkan countries to start the certification process where feasible and/or continue lobbying, awareness raising and promotion activities. Assistance in drafting action plan for development of PEFC forest certification scheme, stakeholder mapping and elaboration of draft content of national standard in countries where positive response of forest actors is met will be provided by CNVP and REFORD's network members