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| **GEF DYNA** **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOP****Beleu Pilot Project (Moldova)** |  |
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| **GEF-6 Project "Regional (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, Ukraine, Serbia) Danube River Basin Hydromorphology and River Restoration****(GEF DYNA)"****27/28 July 2018 – Valeni, Moldova**  |  |
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# Welcome

The meeting took place in Valeni village (Cahul district) at the local gymnasium “Stefan cel Mare”. It was opened by Mr Aurel Lozan (moderator) who welcomed all participants and thanked them for their time. The purpose of the meeting was very briefly described along with the general scope of the proposed project. The agenda of the two-day workshop was presented: the meeting on the 27th of July and the field mission the next day on the 28th of July. The local mayor of Valeni public administration (Mrs Silvia Stirbet) and the director of the gymnasium (Mr Nicoale Burca) welcomed the audience too and thanked WWF for the opportunity to discuss the project in their community.

# Introduction of participants

Introductions continued with the tour du table, with participants providing their names, institutions and connections to HYMO and DYNA (List of participants in the annex). A total of 20 people participated: 14 locals (inhabitants, people working for local institutions), two officials from Agency Moldovan Waters (including acting director), two visitors and two on behalf of WWF. Each of the participants shared their views and their expectations from the stakeholder gathering. All of them agreed that the dialogue would allow them to exchange opinions and make their voices heard. The introduction took a little longer than expected, as participants seemed to be excited about the project idea and wanted to tell about their own experiences related to the project location. Many participants told exciting stories about their villages; one from Slobozia Mare community described in a passionate way her experiences with visitors and tourists from many foreign countries who came especially to see the Beleu Lake and the amazing wetlands around it. Two foreign tourists (a mixed family from USA and Moldova) who were at that time in the Valeni pension for a vacation expressed their willingness to join the meeting and their presence was warmly accepted by the audience, especially by the locals.

# Project Presentation

A PPT presentation was prepared by Aurel Lozan (WWF Moldova) and updated/verified by Veaceslav Purcic. The PPT was structured into three parts: starting with the GEF DYNA project, then the Beleu pilot, and an interactive discussion at the end. The presentation was in Romanian language.

# Pilot Project Presentation

The Beleu pilot project presentation was split into the following parts: general data (name, location, area, map, historical versus actual data), goals and activities (overall aim, proposed preliminary activities, possible actions and technological/methodological interventions, other aspects), stakeholder engagement and commitment, and challenges to be addressed (including similar activities/actions elsewhere). The presentation was based not only on the many sources of available data/information (since this is a Nature Reserve, there is a compulsory annual census of biodiversity and other changes in the environment), but also on field observations and analyses done by the WWF team over the last period. All of the proposed activities have already been discussed among the main stakeholders in advance (including some representatives present at the meeting) and confirmed by a protocol of intention (PoI signed recently on 12th of June, 2018, at Nature Reserve Lower Prut). However, these activities are not yet finalised, they are preliminary concepts for restoring the hydrologic regime in the Beleu Lake and for connecting brooks with the wetland system. The reason for action is that there are visible signs of degradation in the lake’s ecosystems (especially aquatic) and water regime. Thanks to recent visits to the area and meetings with local people, it is known that those who live here are extremely worried about the lake’s current condition; they claim that there is less water, much less fish, and the bottom of the lake is raising, and they think this is a real peril to their own living conditions. Finally, the meeting was organised to make sure that the voices and opinions of locals are heard and taken into consideration in the preparatory phase of the project.

# Aspects discussed (project & proposed pilot project)

A special attention was paid to the current **aggressive erosion** around the lake, namely on its eastern side (ravines between the southern exit of Valeni community towards the northern entry into Slobozia Mare village). Here active erosion of the land is occurring because of deforestation in the recent past, when local people abusively cut trees down for energy needs (=fuelwood) and let their cattle graze after deforestation – a process that happened during 1990s (after the collapse of Soviet Union). In addition, run-off water coming from agricultural fields of Slobozia Mare was **re-directed by a dam** through the village that eventually ends up in the eastern side of deforested ravines, thus the run-off water flows directly into the areas near the lake and also damages the rail construction around the lake.

The staff of the Nature Reserve Lower Prut raised the issue of **willow’s invasive behaviour**, which started rapidly after 2008 and is taking place now with even more aggressive trend: between the first Forest Management Planning (FMP) in 2001 and the latest update (re-FMP) in 2015 the area of willow increased by circa 200 ha, eventually advancing into the lake’s surface (thus reducing the lake’s surface). A local inhabitant from Slobozioa Mare proposed the idea of **(controlled) cattle grazing** as part of the invasive plant management during dry seasons when the uprooting of willow is being planned.

Many participants pointed out the **active siltation process** associated with a visible **eutrophication process** in the water, which is happening right now in the lake with an aggravated pace. Despite various cyclic phenomena, such as almost total drying out of the lake and of the feeding brooks (for instance in 2015), all participants regarded water balance as a normal process; however, all the visible changes of the last decade(s) are putting certain stress on locals because they have less traditionally used resources available (for instance fish).

Locals have helped to clarify the name and origin of the brook that WWF have called Manolescu artificial brook or canal. It turned out that the brook should not be named as that in the first half of its length till Cioroiu brook junction: this portion is called by local elderly people **“The brook”**, and it is of **natural origin**. The continuation of the brook after Cioroiu junction is in fact the “**Manoelscu brook/canal”**, called that way also by the local elderly people, and it is of **artificial origin**, built in the 1930s.

Many participants mentioned that despite some progress (meaning reduction of incidents), **poaching** is still a relevant problem in the area, Beleu Lake included. The lake is a protected area that falls under legislation where poaching and/or illegal activities are prohibited. Participants also confirmed that most of the **local people were traditionally involved in fishing**, be it legal or illegal, as fish is an important source of existence for their families.

Locals have shared thoughts on the railroad built recently in the area; it goes on the edge of the Beleu Lake and spans over the whole wetland ecosystems from Giurgiulesti port to Cahul town. They said the chosen location for the **railroad is unsuccessful** (was a mistake) because in some areas the water damages it during flooding while in other areas there is a risk that the railroad will be destroyed by run-off water coming from the deforested hills.

All concerns described above were discussed in the field mission the next day. The purpose of the field visit was to see (and provide an update of) the environmental conditions at present moment, including hydrologic regime, depth measurements, biodiversity, water flow and other observations that might be useful. The team was split into two groups: the **Ground Group** (led by Aurel Lozan, with representatives of high management of Moldovan Waters and a water engineering specialist of a water planning institute) that went by car to the upstream canals and the Prut River (to so-called Manolescu brook), and the **Water Group** (led by Veaceslav Purcic, with representatives from the Nature Reserve Lower Prut) that went by a motor boat through the Beleu Lake to visit all the brooks (Manolescu, Popovka, Rotaru, Navodului, and the Prut River itself) and the areas where willow is advancing into the lake’s water surface. The final roundtable took place after the field visits at the administration building of the Nature Reserve Lower Prut (director, Mr Gheorghe Vasilachi), where all observations were shared and discussed.

# Conclusions

Most participants agreed that the main cause of siltation in the Beleu Lake is likely to be the run-off water (with stones, debris, agricultural organic matter etc.) coming through the eastern ravines, which are now under aggressive and active erosion process. The best way to try to address this is to undertake a **combined land erosion control**, which can be done through *(re)afforestation* (trees, shrubs, or bio-groups) and *terracing*, using various techniques and materials (including appropriate plant/tree/shrub species). Additionally, a drainage canal (that was built at the edge of the Slobozia Mare village close to Beleu Lake to avoid water flow through the village) is believed to aggravate the situation, so redirecting this canal to its initial direction **would help run-off water to flow** into its natural ravine, thus avoiding entering Beleu Lake.

The initial idea of **terminating the Manolescu brook should be dropped/abandoned** at this stage, as it doesn’t seem feasible for several reasons. First, the upper part of the brook is of natural origin and the lower part is (partially) artificial, and since the water anyway ends up in the Beleu (terminating entirely would require a great amount of work and money), nothing would change if it was redirected or stopped at any point. Second, the siltation caused by the brook that splits from Prut River near Valeni village (whether it is natural or artificial) is much less severe compared to siltation caused by run-off water from eroded hills of the eastern deforested ravines. Third, there might be a problem in receiving ecological expert authorization for intervention (according to legislation), given that this is a protected area.

Rehabilitation of the brooks like the **Popovka brook is very relevant**. Only manual work should be envisaged and only in dry seasons (depending on climate condition) when the water level is very low, which would make it more accessible (at this point, water level is rather high, so access to the brook is only possible by boat). Our field observations showed that the water flow from Prut into the Beleu Lake was not high (thus less sediments entering the lake), and the water transparency in Popovka brook was good (not advanced by various sediments), which are good signs.

The management of **invasive willow should be a priority** as it is considered extremely important and vital for Beleu’s stability. The DYNA project (along with stakeholders) should design a management plan with a clear approach methodology to identify selected lots for uprooting. This should take into consideration the zoning of the Nature Reserve, so that the core zone will be avoided (although the core area is already affected by the invasive willow).

The road that connects the Beleu Lake with the main road of Slobozia Mare village **should be improved,** as it is also a source of siltation (it is a country road without any drainage or other system of rain or run-off water control).

# Next steps

Administration of the Nature Reserve will undertake further observations, so all changes in the Beleu and the wetlands around it will be documented and shared with the project team. They will also try to obtain the dam construction documentation for the drainage system in the Slobozia Mare village as they believe the whole drainage system was done incorrectly (or with serious errors), which is now one of the causes of run-off water flow to the Beleu Lake.

As proposed at the meeting, WWF (Aurel Lozan) will get in touch with State Enterprise Moldovan Rail Roads (MRR) to discuss the Beleu pilot (DYNA project) and the threat of the siltation along with possible land-sliding from the deforested ravines on the eastern side of Beleu Lake. The MRR is interested in the project and is also a potential stakeholder and contributor to the activities.

All stakeholders will be updated on the Beleu pilot project preparation. All necessary information or other relevant data will be shared among stakeholders. The final draft of the Beleu pilot will be presented to local stakeholders once it is finalised.

# Gender issue

A session was organized at the end of the meeting on July 27th, 2018, and it took about one hour. Both men and women actively participated: 3 local men and 9 local women expressed their willingness to stay at the session. Mr Veaceslav Purcic conducted the session; the results of the meeting are documented below (according to the list of participants and gender issue lists).

**QUESTION MAP**

Below are the questions with answers that would contribute to the gender mainstreaming in the project.

**Notes**

*Predominant feedback* = what most of men or women say, what the commonly agreed ideas are

*Unique feedback* = ideas that are expressed by 1 or 2 members should be documented as well

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| **Area of interest** | **Questions** | **Predominant women’s feedback** | **Unique women’s answers** | **Predominant men’s feedback** | **Unique men’s answers** |
| 1. Needs and interests | 1.1. What are the most salient needs in your area at the moment? | No waste sewage system in their communities. No waste management system in place. Lack of skilled specialists and jobs. | Heavy tracks that make noise and destroy the road infrastructure.  | Drinking water of low quality. Deforestation and illegal logging. | Low salary and massive emigration of their country mates. |
| 1.2. What do you lack most of all in the community? | No stable future (no stability). No trust in federal Government (or ruling power). | More women emigrate for jobs than men. | Emigration abroad of whole families (not only women or men). Increasing pressure from the federal Government to ordinary local people. | More stability in their communities. |
| 1.3. Why are these water resources important to you? | Shrinkage (reduction) of drinking water resources. Climate change is affecting water resources availability in their region. | Abusive and unsustainable use of drinking water. | Strategic water resources are becoming scarce. | Water is essential for their families. |
| 1.4. How do you use these water resources in your everyday life? E.g.:*- everyday activities**- health**- access to food and water**- etc.* | Water in wells and springs contains more calcium. Waste sewage in their community is primitive (use of holes and latrines) that affects water quality. | Wells close to river/lake (roots of the hills) are of poor quality. | Water contains calcium (according to their data). Water levels are lowering. Existing water treatment facility is inefficient and obsolete (from old times).  | Chemical (hazardous) spots, soviet remnants still present in the area, are a true danger. |
| 1.5. Do your work and income depend on this water basin? In what ways?* *Your personal?*
* *Your family’s?*
 | Partially, yes! It is used for garden (small-scale or improvised) irrigation | Rather Yes than No, as we sell agro-foods from garden to local markets. | Partially, yes! Irrigation at households, gardens. Armature fishing.  | Rather Yes than No – all for irrigation. |
| 2. Participation in the implementation of the project | 2.1. Who do you think has the most responsibility for the success of the project? | Project team. Local population. Local administration (mayoralty, council). | Local public authority. | Project team. Local activists. Locals involved in the project implementation. | Local administration. |
| 2.2. Do you feel that the community has knowledge and capacity to contribute to the project? | Yes, the society has enough knowledge, but some training and workshops would be desirable.  | Yes! | There are skilled locals, but some awareness and training (based on specific skill development) would be acceptable. | Yes! |
| 2.3. Whose opinions are necessary to account for while implementing the project, to your mind? | Local administration. Skilled specialists in specific areas (with technical knowledge). | Experts. | Local council (board) of the community. Experts in various fields that can complement each other for the project. | Elderly (older) persons from the community. |
| 3. Results:expectations, benefits, and potential losses | 3.1. What would you see as the best outcomes of the project?*- For you personally, for your family, for the community?* | All proposed activities (presented today) are important for our communities. Ravines land erosion is much more important than the artificial brook. | Reduced land erosion (and siltation). | All proposed activities are important for the communities (unanimously said by all men). | Restored water balance. |
| 3.2. What do you expect from the project realistically? | General ecological condition of the area improved. More eco-tourism movement, and facilities. | More opportunities. | Land erosion is a real peril and should be stopped! | Re-afforestation of the destroyed riverbank forests and vegetation. |
| 3.3. Which improvements in the community or in your life do you want to have? | Improved attitude towards nature (=environment) and for the Beleu Lake (a protected area). | Healthier environment. | Better living condition. More woody (forest) areas to provide energetic wood. | Healthier environment. |
| 3.4. What are your main concerns and worries about the project? | Reaction of local population towards the project and its activities.  | Receptiveness of local population. | Relation between locals (and groups) with the project. | Project connection to locals. |
| 3.5. In what ways can the project activities make lives of other members of the community better? Children? Elderly? | More tourism (eco- or rural-tourism). More flora and fauna (as attractiveness for tourists). | More income opportunities. | Improved tourism activities. More fish (species) community as a basis for fishing tourism or leisure in nature. | More opportunities. |
| 3.6. Are there any reasons why you do not want the project or any of its parts to take place? | No  | No  | No  | No  |

**GENERAL SUMMARY OF THE MEETING** (TO BE FILLED IN AFTER THE MEETING)

1. Total number of men in the meeting: 7 participated in the meeting, but only 3 provided answers.
2. Total number of women in the meeting: 11 participated in the meeting, only 9 provided answers.
3. Was there any conflict of interests between and among men and women during the meeting? No conflict, all went great.
4. Did men or women dominate over each other considerably in terms of time they spoke, the amount of feedback they gave, etc.? No such domination, all seemed equally done.
5. Describe briefly how men and women responded to each other’s comments and opinions. (Supportive/indifferent/disapproving? Are they aware of each other’s special needs and expectations?) All were polite and the meeting was a very friendly one.
6. Other comments: We were very pleased that two foreign visitors wanted to join the meeting. Local people invited them to their homes, and the administration of Nature Reserve invited them to their building canton (although not a modern facility, but rather a rustic one) and field visits too. The tourist couple (Lucia and Heath) seemed to be very happy and excited about the nature.

# Annex - List of participants

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| *Nr. Crt.* | *Name* | *Institution/Country* | *Position* | *Contact details* |
|  | Mr Nicolae Burca | Gymnasium “Stefan cel Mare” of Valeni community | Director | Tel (landline): 0299 63222Cell: 079009147 |
|  | Mrs Mariana Burca | Gymnasium “Stefan cel Mare” of Valeni community | Ecology master | Cell: 078571252 |
|  | Mrs Elena Tataru | Valeni village administration | Secretary  | Tel (landline): 0299 61238 |
|  | Mr Ion Capatina | Slobozia Mare village | Local inhabitant (pensionary)  | Cell: 079195211 |
|  | Ms Maria Capatina | Nature Reserve Lower Prut | Non-administrative worker | Cell: 068696400 |
|  | Mrs Viorica Paladi | Nature Reserve Lower Prut | Science Officer (Ornithology) | Cell: 078796375 |
|  | Ms Polina Cassir | Nature Reserve Lower Prut | Research officer (Botany) | Cell: 078353311 |
|  | Mr Gheorghe Vasilachi | Nature Reserve Lower Prut | Director | Cell: 068383000 |
|  | Mrs Silvia Stirbet | Valeni village local administration | Mayor | Cell: 079017151 |
|  | Mr Veaceslav Purcic | State University of Moldova / WWF | Vice-dean of Biology | Cell: 079541187 |
|  | Mr Constantin Bostan | Oil extraction company “Valiexchimp” SRL | Social protection officer | Cell: 078641834 |
|  | Mrs Lucia Melrose | QSI school (master, English/Romanian) | Tourist | Cell: 069790693 |
|  | Mr Heath Melrose | QSI school (master, general education) | Tourist | Cel: 060018618 |
|  | Mrs Maria Niculita | Kindergarten of Valeni community | Master (local inhabitant) | Tel (landline): 0299 63190 |
|  | Mrs Lidia Brinza | Valeni village local administration | Secretary | Tel (landline): 0299 63239 |
|  | Mrs Lidia Erni | Slobozia Mare local administration | Economist | Tel (landline): 0299 64382 |
|  | Mrs Nina Viuncul | Valeni village | Local inhabitant | Cell: 079414394nincic832@yahoo.com  |
|  | Mr Radu Cazacu | Agency Moldovan Waters | Acting Director | Cel: 076077676radu.cazacu@apele.gov.md  |
|  | Mr Gheorghe Voda | IPS “Iprocom”, Agency Moldovan Waters | Planning specialist, administrator | Cel: 069579419iprocom@mtc.md  |
|  | Mr Aurel Lozan | WWF DCP | Lead Expert Moldova | Cel: 069044172alozan@wwfdcp.org  |