

**EASTERN ANATOLIA TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**  
**PROGRESS REPORT**  
**MARCH 2007- DECEMBER 2007**

**1.1 Background Information**

Although Turkey is a middle-income country with an approximate per capita GDP of over US\$ 5,000, there are significant disparities in terms of socio-economic development between geographical regions. Socio-economic development level of Eastern provinces is consistently behind that of western regions. In the 12 NUTS-1 regions, the Northeastern and Eastern Anatolia regions rate the lowest respectively. These areas are characterized by lower per capita GDP, a higher ratio of agriculture in economy, lower urbanization ratio and high outmigration. Employment, health, education and infrastructure related indicators also contribute to the lower socioeconomic development, in line with MDGs. These regions are also usually far away from the industrial regions and lack the human resource capacity and infrastructure to develop an industry.

Northeastern Anatolia Region heavily relies on agricultural sector and shows relatively low capacity of efficient farming practices and low level of competitive power. Therefore, both the local stakeholders and the central government with its regional and national level development strategies promote development of new, non-agricultural sectors as a means to provide alternative income generation lines. One of these alternative sectors is community based tourism, which is considered globally to be a sector for pro-poor economic growth.

Çoruh Region, covering the districts Ispir, Uzundere, Narman, Olur, Tortum and Yusufeli has a strong potential for tourism, owing to its natural beauties. The Çoruh valley, with its high potential for summer tourism activities could bring new economic life and new opportunities to the region in the long run, despite its seasonal nature. The River Çoruh, one of Turkey's natural beauties, originates at the Mescit Mountains (3,225 m) and flows 466 km before reaching the Black Sea in Georgia. This is one of the fastest flowing rivers in the world. The small towns and villages located along the river are impressively authentic and historically interesting. The area as a whole represents the synthesis of the cultures of Eastern Anatolia and the Black Sea, and

the Kaçkar Mountains offer highly attractive possibilities for canoeing, rafting and trekking.

Depending upon the situation stated above, United Nations Development Programme launched "Eastern Anatolia Anatolia Tourism Development Project" in cooperation with Ministry of Culture and Tourism and Efes Pilsen on 31th of March, 2007 for the aim of reducing regional disparities through support to income generating sectors that are alternative to agriculture for Eastern Anatolia Region, more specifically Coruh Valley including Ispir, Uzundere, Narman, Olur and Tortum. The project is nationally executed by Ministry of Culture and Tourism, and funded by Efes Pilsen. The project aims to support the development of a sustainable community based tourism sector in Coruh Valley for maximizing the use of tourism potential of the region for local economic development. Following main target lines are determined under those the activities will be carried out for reaching the intended output:

- (1) Identification and Dissemination of Coruh Valley's Richness for the development of Tourism products
- (2) Organizational Capacity Building among Local Stakeholders
- (3) Promotion of the Region and the Project, raising awareness on the potentials of tourism for income generation

For the effective implementation of the project, a *Project Coordination Unit* has been established. The Project Coordination Unit is composed of a *Project Senior Advisor* based in Erzurum; a *Site Manager* based in Ispir, a *Project Associate* based in Ankara and two *Field Officers* (in both Ispir and Uzundere). Two project offices were established in Ispir and Uzundere, with the in-kind contribution of respective Municipalities. This report details the activities carried out under the above three main targets and the progress made over ten months in 2007. (March-December 2007).

## **2. ACTIVITIES AND PROGRESS**

### **2.1 Identification and Dissemination of Coruh Valley's Richness for the development of Tourism Products**

Coruh Valley's current potential for the development of tourism products was put forward through the following conducted inventory studies and route development activities:

### *2.1.1 Botany Inventory and Product Development*

### *2.1.2 Wild Fruit Inventory and Product Development*

### *2.2.3 Birds Inventory and Bird-Watching Routes Development*

### *2.1.4 Trekking Routes Development*

These inventory studies resulted in identification of Uzundere's, Yusufeli's and Ispir's botany and wild fruit kinds as well as bird species with specific importance and their locations in the area. Five spots for bird-watching were identified as region's tourism products and 16 new trekking routes were developed. These inventory studies have also been a kind of on-the-job training for local people since the inventory studies were conducted together with selected local people. The conducted inventory studies highlight the below points, where Coruh Valley can present a value and become a destination point:

- 206 different kinds of birds can be observed in Coruh Valley. All the endemic species of Black Sea and the Eastern Anatolia can also be observed in the area. It is also possible to observe different predacious species at one time.
- The Valley has a huge population of Hippophae rhamnoides L, which is known as an important antioxidant and can be used in cancer treatment.
- The Valley has many different kinds of wild fruits, which are also processed and conserved as food by local people.
- The trekking routes offer opportunities for exploring the natural and historical assets of the area as well as the traditional ways of living, habits and agricultural activity.

## **2.2 Organizational Capacity Building and Skills Development For Local Stakeholders**

### ***2.2.1 Establishment of District Tourism Committees***

In both districts of the project region; ***Ispir and Uzundere***; district tourism committees were composed for participatory planning and implementation. These committees are composed of the members from the local administration, current and prospective local tourism and related business sector employees and entrepreneurs.

These committees have regularly met for discussing the project activities in the region. The activity plans of the project have been discussed in committee meetings and finalized with the participation of the committee members. These committees also aim to monitor the tourism activities in the region as well as the activities of the project.

### **2.2.2 Rural Tourism Workshop and SWOT Analysis Study**

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of May, 2007 a workshop on rural tourism was held in Ispir with the participation of 45 people. The workshop was followed by a half-day SWOT Analysis Study. During the SWOT Analysis Practice, the local stakeholders contributed to the identification of advantages, disadvantages, weak and strong sides of Coruh Valley for sustainable and tourism-based, economic development. The workshop and the SWOT Analysis practice were repeated within the same framework in Uzundere on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, 2007 by the participation of 120 people.

This workshop has been the first visibility and launch event of the project the project region. Furthermore, local people were introduced with an alternative income generating activity sector, which is tourism. With this initiative, they became aware of the tourism potential of their region, what should be done and what should be avoided for a long-term regional development where local people benefit the most.

### **2.2.3 Organizational Capacity Building and Skills Development Trainings**

The table below presents the activities that were organized to support the capacities of local stakeholders and beneficiaries on general awareness on tourism, organizational issues, vocational skills on tourism and tourism-related business sectors, along with the number of participants.

<b>Training</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Number of Trainees</b>
Project Cycle Management Trainings	19-21 May 2007	Uzundere	16

Project Cycle Management Trainings	26-28 June 2007	İspir	15
Organizational Capacity Building Training	7 July 2007	İspir	23
Organizational Capacity Building Training	8 July 2007	Uzundere	24
Trekking Guiding Trainings	25-26 August 2007	İspir	36 (19 İspir/17 Uzundere)
Camping and Hiking Trainings	23-29 October 2007	İspir /Uzundere	50
Total Number of Trainees			164

As the result of these trainings and efforts, Coruh Valley has its own

- (a) Civil society organizations such as the newly established associations *Uzundere Doğa ve Spor Kulubu Dernegi* and *Yedigol'den Yedigole Yasam Dernegi*. The establishment of these new legal entities will enable local people to jointly act for their region's development.
- (b) Trekking and Camping Guides from local youngsters who will lead and/or assist the tours coming to the region and make incomes in the future.
- (c) Project Development Teams: After the project cycle management trainings, each district formed a project development team to create new project ideas and apply to various funds for grants.

Furthermore, the local people started to consider tourism as a new and alternative way of earning their lives. In parallel, these trainings contributed to the change in attitudes of the local people towards their surroundings and own hometown. They stated that they started to see their surroundings; the mountains, the lake, the fields, the birds they have been watching since they were born, with a different perspective.

#### ***2.2.4 Regional Tourism Strategy Development Mission and Workshop***

Capacity Enhancement Training Programme and Regional Tourism Strategy Development Missions were held in September and November 2007. The mission was lead by an expert from United Nations World Tourism Organization, who had extensive international experience on tourism planning and capacity development on tourism. The main objective of this mission was to prepare a short-medium and long term regional tourism strategy development, supported by a capacity development component. A national tourism expert and a commercial tourism expert were also the members of the mission to reflect the Turkey's current situation on vocational training and tourism as a business sector. As a result of the missions, the project has its own capacity building enhancement programme to implement throughout the project. Furthermore, Eastern Anatolia Region has a tourism strategy which is designed to be a complementary initiative to Turkey's current 2023 Tourism Strategy.

The first findings of the mission were shared with the local stakeholders, i.e. district governors and mayors of the project region's districts namely Ispir, Yusufeli, Uzundere, Narman, Tortum, Olur, Oltu as well as the selected private sector representatives working in tourism sector on 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2007 in Erzurum. The presentation was followed by a discussion session for an interactive and participatory strategy development practice with the contributions of the local tourism administrators and practitioners. The ideas and recommendations of the local beneficiaries and practitioners have been reflected in the final version of the strategy.

#### ***2.2.5 Logistical Support to the Organization of Efes Pilsen-Boğazici Vocational Tourism Trainings***

The project provided transportation and lunch to the trainees of the Efes Pilsen-Boğazici University Vocational Tourism program held in Erzurum and Ispir for one month period. In addition, the project also took active role in announcing the training program at the local level and bringing in relevant participants.

#### ***2.2.6 Support to Establishment of an Accommodation Facility in Uzundere***

Uzundere does not have any accommodation facility that can provide professional tourism services. For the development of tourism activity in Uzundere and its surroundings, there is a strong need for an accommodation facility, and Uzundere Municipality started to work for establishing such an accommodation facility. With the support of the project, the location where the facility will be built has been defined in line with the recommendations of relevant experts in Ministry of Culture and Tourism. The next steps will be to finalize the agreements on the institutional supports and starting of the construction. While the project has been instrumental in linking the Municipality with the Ministry, further support will be provided to facilitate the construction.

## **2.3 Promotion of the Region and the Project**

### ***2.3.1 Regular Visits, Meetings and Presentations at the Project Region***

From the launch of the project, relevant national and local stakeholders such as the Governorate, district governorates, municipalities, mukhtars of the villages, private sector representatives, civil society organizations as well as people who live in the project region have been informed and updated on the targets and activities, the progress of the project through regular visits of the project staff on site; regularly organized meetings and presentations.

At the district centers of Uzundere and Ispir and 14 villages, total number of 22 meetings was organized with the participation of 340 people for awareness rising on activities of the project and sustainable, tourism-based regional development. Along with the regular visits and organized meetings, presentations about the project were made to the participants of Cabotage Festival that was held on the 1st of July, 2007 at Tortum Lake as well as that of Uzundere and Bird Watching Festival held on 7-9<sup>th</sup> of September, 2007 at Ispir/Uzundere.

These meetings and discussions were instrumental in updating the local stakeholders, local authorities and beneficiaries on the project, its partners, its ongoing activities and also on opportunities of development of sustainable tourism in the region as a new income generating activity. A concrete outcome of this is that, the local partners have started to consider tourism as an alternative economic activity to their current economic activities.

### ***2.3.2 Design and Printing of Çoruh Valley Promotion Materials***

The informative hand brochure on Coruh Valley, Coruh Birds (both in Turkish and English) were designed and printed along with 11 different kind of posters, 50 different kinds of postcards. The printed promotion materials have been handed out to people both at local and national events. Furthermore, Coruh Valley's Birds Brochures were handed out to interested parties at International Bird Watching Festival that was held in UK in July, 2007. It was for the first time that Coruh Valley was introduced to international bird watching community as a new bird watching destination.

### ***2.3.3 Preparation of Informative Signboards of Natural and Historical Assets***

Adding to the hand out printed materials about the Coruh Valley's tourism richness and products, the informative signboards of natural and historical assets of Coruh Valley namely Osvank Church, İshan Church, Tortum Waterfall, Narman Fairy Chimneys were prepared and erected in front of the assets. It has been for the first time that these assets have their own signboards informing the visitors about the creation and/or history of the asset.

### ***2.3.4 Coruh Valley Bird Watching Festival***

On the 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> of September, 2007, Bird Watching Festival was held in Ispir and Uzundere Districts. It was the first Bird Watching Festival organized in the region. The Bird Watching Potential of the region was introduced to the birders coming from all over Turkey for the first time.

## **4. COORDINATION AMONG PROJECT PARTNERS**

For the aim of effective implementation of the project, the project partners namely Ministry of Culture and Tourism, UNDP Country Office and Efes Pilsen, coordination meetings with the agenda of project progress and future activities were held for several times through face to face meetings and/or teleconferences. Furthermore, the project unit updated the project partners on the progress with monthly and/or bi-monthly project progress reports.