**SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME**

**BUNA PHASE II**

**IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES AND CRITERIA FOR APPLICANTS**

*The protection of nature and the promotion of biodiversity can only be sustainable if the people who are geographically, economically and culturally close to the areas involved are at ease and happy with the protection of nature.*

The IUCN Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECARO), along with the partner organizations – PAP/RAC and INCA is in charge of the implementation of the Small Grants Program (SGP) for NGOs, Civil Society Organizations, University and local communities residing within the Buna River-Velipoje Protected Landscape (BRVPL) located in the Shkodra Municipality of northwestern Albania. The program is financed by the MAVA Foundation.

The SGP is a part of the Buna Delta Protection Project (www.livingbuna.org). The overall goal of the project is to ensure the long-term conservation of species and habitats in the Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape with particular emphasis on halting or significantly reducing unsustainable development and water abstraction. In order to address these threats, site-based measures are planned to be carried out within the frames of the Small Grants Program.

1. **Small Grants Program objectives**

The aim of the Small Grants Program is to support sustainable practices by funding local green business initiatives, ecosystem and habitat restoration that contribute to the sustainable development of the region while supporting the conservation of the Protected Landscape. All actions should be in line with the objectives of the Protected Landscape and thus assisting the implementation of the Management Plan. They are aimed at preserving the area’s ecological and cultural values, while developing untapped potential of socio-economic activities directly linked to the sustainable use of the services granted by the existing ecosystem.

**The SGP has the following four thematic priorities:**

1. **Habitat restoration and application of Nature-based Solutions;**
2. **Agro-environmental and water saving incentive schemes including improving sustainability of irrigation systems;**
3. **Sustainable tourism development;**
4. **Sustainable fisheries.**

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\* BRVPL management plan objectives are presented in the Annex 1.

1. **Amount of financing**

The financing approved by the Small Grants Fund will be based on specific needs of each project, as submitted by the applicants through their proposed project budget. The project proposals will be reviewed and approved for financing by the Small Grant’s evaluation committee which reserves the right to modify the proposed project budget to better reflect the project’s activities or to align the budget with the program requirements. The total budget of the program is 108,000 Euro, which will be shared among all thematic priorities:

* **Minimum amount of grant per project: 5,000.00 EUR**
* **Maximum amount of grant per project implemented by individuals/non-legal entities: 10,000.00 EUR**
* **Maximum amount of grant per project implemented by organizations/legal entities/business operators: 20,000.00 EUR**
* **Maximum amount of grant per project for consortium of several partners: 30,000 EUR in case if project covers 2 thematic priorities – 40,000 EUR, in case the project covers 3 or more thematic priorities.**

**Co-financing is highly encouraged** in order to show commitment to the project in the future, i.e. prove the sustainability of the activity. It should amount to approximately 30% of the budget. Co-financing is not calculated to the amount provided by the Small Grant. Co-financing can include direct financing of the project (cash), labor/work of the applicant (in-kind) and alike. The application should specify details of co-financing.

Priority will be given to the projects that envisage co-financing from applicants.

*Note: in case there are unused funds left due to the lack of applications, the amount of each grant can be increased accordingly.*

1. **Project duration and timeline for the Grant Program**

Minimum duration of the proposed project is 6 months, while maximum project duration is 11 months. The projects under this Program should be implemented from October 2021, and should have finished by 30 September 2022.

Call for the Small Grants shall be opened on **01 August 2021 at 09:00 and will close on 22 August 2021 at 23:59 CEST**.

All applicants will be notified about the decision in 10 working days from the closing date of the call.

1. **Thematic priorities / main activities**

The Small Grants projects will address one or more of the four following thematic priorities:

**a) Coastal habitat restoration and application of Nature-based Solutions**

Nature-based Solutions are actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural and modified ecosystems in ways that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, to provide both human well-being and biodiversity benefits. They are underpinned by benefits that flow from healthy ecosystems and target major challenges like climate change, disaster risk reduction, food and water security, health and are critical to economic development.

Situation analysis and existing threats

The BRVPL covers one of the largest and most important wetland systems in Albania. It includes a great variety of wetland habitats; some of them listed in the Habitat Directive 92/43/CEE as being priority areas for conservation. Within the BRPL the overall occurrence of wetlands has been greatly reduced through drainage and conversion to agricultural land. Key wetland areas include the Buna River and delta, Domni Marsh and Viluni Lagoon, and the Velipojë wetlands encapsulated within the core conservation area of the BRPL.

The main threat to water resources is the increasing level of pollution, such as the release of untreated wastewaters; poor management of solid waste and increased use of agricultural chemicals such as fertilizers and pesticides. Solid waste carried from Shkodra by the Buna River is deposited into the sea, resulting in pollution of coastal areas. These impacts represent a direct threat to wetland systems and to human populations in the form of contaminated drinking water supplies. The washing up of solid wastes on Velipoje beach also creates a significant concern.

**Examples of the eligible activities** (these are only examples and other activities that are aimed at coastal habitat restoration can also be considered)**:**

* Afforestation of degraded and fragmented riverine forest areas along the Buna River;
* Restoration of remnant sand dune areas in order to reconstruct the typical habitat sequence for sand dunes;
* Restoration of important habitats within BRVPL;
* Restoration of rare plants species in order to increase their numbers (if applicable); and
* Inventory of Biodiversity rich and vulnerable coastal areas/habitats.

A sound preparatory work and thorough planning should inform all restoration work. Projects should clearly demonstrate that all precautionary measures are taken to prevent damage and/or deterioration of priority habitats or have any other adverse impact.

**b) Agro-environmental and water saving incentive schemes including irrigation**

Situation analysis and existing threats

Key constrains in agriculture include land fragmentation and the small farm sizes, limited levels of production, difficulties in accessing credit and therefore investing in mechanization and irrigation, and in accessing markets. Additional threats relate to the high risk of flooding and the associated poor status of some of the drainage canals and pump stations. Damage by birds to crops and losses of livestock to wildlife is also present, but is not considered to be significant.

The extent of wetlands within the BRPL have been drastically reduced through drainage works which have enabled their conversion to agricultural uses, to the extent that the bulk of the floodplain area is now under intensive agricultural production. Additional threats come in the form of deteriorating water quality, in particular relating to run-off from adjacent agricultural fields and high levels of utilization by livestock.

**Examples of the eligible activities** (these are only examples and someother activities that are aimed at creation of agro-environmental incentive schemes can also be consideredin order to improve agricultural practices and become more environmentally friendly):

* Environmental friendly storage containers for manure (to reduce leakage of nitrogen into the ground water and afterwards in to the river);
* Protect valuable/rare/endemic habitats within the agricultural land by putting fences to avoid overgrazing by sheep;
* Improve irrigation systems in order to save water;
* Growing of medicinal plants/herbs native to the protected landscape and harvested unsustainably/illegally (Salvia);
* Improvement of water quality.

**c) Sustainable tourism development**

Situation analysis and existing threats

The main tourism activity is summer beach tourism. Visitors typically stay for only a short period (from a few days to weeks). This type of high volume – low spending tourism results in high pressure to local resources, for example in terms of demand for services and the management of waste. It is also a key driver for the on-going uncontrolled urban development.

Sand dunes are another component that is highly threatened, largely due to tourism related impacts in the form of both high levels of direct use (beach tourism) and the development of infrastructure to service the beach tourists. Coastal erosion is another important threat, which is related to upstream dam construction resulting in reduced sediment loads in the Buna River, and hence lower rates of sediment deposition in coastal system.

**Examples of the eligible activities** (these are only examples and someother activities that are aimed at Sustainable tourism sector/infrastructure development can also be considered)**:**

* Development of thematic eco-friendly walking/cycling trails;
* Promote most important habitats, species within the BRVPL (information boards);
* Development of sustainable eco-tourism offers (including accommodation/guesthouses);
* Develop eco-friendly bed and breakfast offer;
* Waste management activities.

*Note: community groups can create a joint offer in order to link the service providers and establish a tourism supply chain in the village. For example several representatives of the community will work on improvement of their housing facilities for visitors, others can create catering offers, while some others can establish bakery (if applicable) or traditional handicraft workshops, etc.*

**d) Sustainable fisheries**

Situation analysis and existing threats

Lake Shkodra is the main site of fishing within the area, but additional fishing is carried out within the BRPL in the Buna River, in the sea, and in the larger wetland areas, particularly Viluni Lagoon. Freshwater fish catch appears to be declining, probably due to current fishing practices which are considered to be unsustainable and reflected in diminishing fish catches. Fishermen in the sea face strong competition from larger vessels that launch from the nearby port. Increasing levels of pollution pose a potential risk in terms of quality of fish for consumption.

**Examples of the eligible activities** (these are only examples and someother activities that are aimed at development of sustainable fisheries can also be considered):

* Establishment/ extension of eco-friendly small private fish farms;
* Support for sustainable fish breading facilities;
* Support for traditional extensive and nature-friendly fishing activities (renewal of fishing equipment etc.).

*Note: above mentioned activities are just examples and some other additional interventions will also be considered. Proposed activities are based on the Management plan and suggest of RAPA.*

1. **Eligibility and geographical coverage**

BRVPL is the initial intervention zone. All projects must be carried out within its boundaries covering the following municipal units: Rrethinat, Ana e Malit, Dajç, Velipojë, Bërdicë, Bushat, Balldren i Ri, and Shëngjin.

Representatives, legal (organizations) and non-legal (individuals) entities of all communities located in Albania that wish to improve the state of BRVLP livelihoods in a sustainable manner through the small grants scheme are eligible to participate. In addition, NGOs, CSOs, University located in Albania are also qualified if proposed projects are within the target PL boundaries.

Organizations or community groups are also welcome to create a coalition/alliance to apply for grants. Priority will be given to organizations with previous experience with BRVPL and work in coalition with the local community.

Note: projects implementing the following activities will be prioritised

* **On-the-ground actions** implemented with a participatory and inclusive process, ensuring strong involvement of the target local communities;
* **Income-generating activities** related to the sustainable development of tourism, natural resources, sustainable agriculture and biodiversity; and
* **Activities contributing to the objectives of BRVPL Management Plan.**

1. **Selection Criteria**

Projects will be selected according to the following criteria

* Technical and economic feasibility of the project;
* Demonstrated sustainability in the long term (through co-financing);
* Contribution to the improved social and economic conditions of local population;
* Expected impact on coastal wetlands, sustainable management of natural resources, sustainable tourism, sustainable fisheries;
* Social and cultural acceptance: involvement of local people, involvement of women;
* For local communities: project that are easy to implement and will result in increased income for household aligned with the PL objectives.

1. **Selection and evaluation committee**

Applications will be assessed by an Evaluation Committee. The committee will be composed of project partners: IUCN (chairman of the Committee), PAP/RAC and INCA. Municipality of Shkodra will act as an observer. The Evaluation Committee will assess and evaluate applications against the mandatory selection criteria using specially designed assessment table with scores. If the mandatory criteria are met, successful applicants will be selected by the Committee and results will be sent to the observer (Municipality of Shkodra) for their final approval.

Evaluation Committee is composed of the following members:

* IUCN (2 members)
* PAP/RAC
* INCA

Observers:

* 1 representative of Shkodra Municipality
* 1 representative of RAPA

Throughout the process of implementation, the newly established management committee of the BRVPL will be informed about progress and selection results.

1. **Application procedure**

All application have to be submitted as a structured documentation package within the given submission deadline to the Institute for Nature Conservation in Albania (INCA) electronically to the following address: info@inca-al.org. Only complete applications will be accepted using the templates provided (Annex 2). Representatives of INCA will be providing support to prospective applicants in order to assist them with application process and answer their questions.

By signing the applicant’s declaration form, the applicant gives IUCN a permission to use the submitted information, including personal data that forms part of the proposal. Where personal data of your employees (e.g. CVs) is included in the proposal, the applicant ensures to have written permission from those individuals to share this information with IUCN, and for IUCN to use this information.

After the call for receiving project proposals is announced potential applicants will have **21 days** to submit their proposals. The committee will evaluate the proposals and inform all applicants about the selection in **10 working days** after the submission deadline. Following the Evaluation Committee’s decision to award the project, the applicant will be notified about the positive decision on financing and subsequently offered to sign the small grant’s agreement.

All applicants must have active bank accounts in euros in order to be able to receive respective installments.

1. **Implementation, monitoring and reporting**

The signing of the contract and the allocation of funds under the Small Grant Program will take place in September 2021. All applicants will receive the funds in two instalments. The first instalment in the amount of **40%** after signing the contract and the other **60%** after the approval of the Final Report. When the project reaches the middle of its implementation period the grantees will be requested to submit interim progress reports (templates will be provided) pertaining to project progress, describing all completed and currently on-going activities, as well as actions planned for the rest of the project period.

After submitting the progress report the field visit by the member of the evaluation committee (representative of RAPA, local project coordinator) will be carried out. The purpose of the monitoring is to assess the progress of the project in implementing the task activities, and to assure that financial expenditures are in accordance with the approved budget for the given period. Monitoring visits will typically include a review of project implementation, as well as in-person meetings with relevant grantee and site visits. If the monitoring visit has identified any concerns, the grant recipient will be required to correct these deficiencies within agreed timelines. Further financing depends on the nature of problem and it will be suspended until the problematic issues are resolved.

Grant recipients are required to submit the final progress report by the completion of the project activities. The final report will be prepared according to the format provided and should include all invoices/receipts for purchasing good and services specified in the application form.

Validation of final report by evaluation committee is a requirement for receiving the final payment

1. **Required documents**

**Non-legal entities (individual applicants):**

* Copy of the ID card or passport
* Applicant declaration form

**Legal entities (NGO, University):**

* The Court Registration Act and the Founding Act of the Organization (copy of the original)
* Organization Statute (copy)
* Properly completed Legal Identification Form
* Tax number (NIPT) (copy)
* A document that certifies the active status of NGO (online portal E-Albania)
* A document that certifies zero tax obligations towards state agencies (online portal E-Albania)
* IUCN Due Diligence form
* Applicant declaration form

**Legal entities (business operators):**

* The registration document from the National center of Business Registration (copy)
* Properly completed Legal Identification Form
* Tax number (NIPT) (copy)
* A document that certifies the active status of Business (online portal E-Albania )
* A document that certifies zero tax obligations towards state agencies (online portal E-Albania)
* Proof of registry in Albania for at least one year (Shkodra Region)
* IUCN Due Diligence form
* Applicant declaration form

1. **Termination of financing**

If, after midterm evaluation, the projects that received first installments are not able to show the required progress, the contracts will be terminated and the grant recipients will be obliged to refund all or any part of the amount received.

If the grant recipient terminates the agreement or abandons the project, the grant recipient shall be obliged to refund to the entire amount disbursed to the grant recipient.

**Annex 1: Vision and objectives of Buna River Velipoje Protected Landscape**

**Vision**: Management of the BRPL is aimed at preserving its ecological and cultural values, while developing untapped potentials of socio-economic activities directly linked to the sustainable use of the services granted by the Protected Landscape's ecosystem.

Consistently, two main objectives are defined for management of the Protected Landscape as outlined below:

Objective 1: Conservation of ecological and cultural values

* Conservation of rangelands
* Conservation of wildlife
* Conservation of water resources

Objective 2: Development of livelihoods based on sustainable use of ecosystem services

* Development of agriculture and livestock sectors
* Development of tourism sector
* Development of safe supplies of drinking water

Annex 2

**SMALL GRANTS FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND HABITAT/ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION**

**Application form**

1. **Information about the applicant**

Name of the Applicant:

Address, phone, email:

Status (firm, NGO, individual, etc.):

Responsible persons for project implementation:

*Organization’s experience*

*Describe why you/your organization is best suited to carry out this project. What relevant experience do you have to address the conservation concern that this project is aiming to address? (maximum 200 words)*

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*Past relevant projects*

*Provide a brief description of previous projects (maximum 3) your organization has been involved in that are relevant for this application. (maximum 300 words)*

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1. **Project Title (should be short, limited to one line)**

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*Project duration*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Duration: *(must not exceed 11 months)* | Start: DD/MM/YYYY | End: DD/MM/YYYY |

*SGP funding request*

|  |  |  |
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| *Project total budget* | *Own contribution* | *SGP funding request* |

1. **Choose thematic priority**

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| --- | --- |
| Coastal habitat restoration and application of Nature-based Solutions |  |
| Agro-environmental/water saving incentive schemes including improving sustainability of irrigation systems |  |
| Sustainable tourism development |  |
| Sustainable fisheries |  |

1. **Area of the BVLP that would benefit from the project implementation**

*Project location*

*Define the geographic location where project activities will take place, indicating whether the site includes any priority habitats. For habitat restoration/large scale projects, please provide GPS coordinates and a map of the project location and boundaries. (maximum 250 words)*

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1. **Location of the project activities** (Municipality, district, village, address if applicable)

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1. **How many people will be involved in the implementation**

*Key project staff*

*Please include the project staff; add rows as needed.*

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| Name: | Position in the project: |
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*Please indicate if the project involves subcontracting and if yes provide details*

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1. **How many people will benefit**

*Project stakeholders and beneficiaries*

*Please indicate which stakeholders you plan to involve in the project. Indicate how many people/households will benefit from the project and how. Disaggregate numbers by direct and indirect beneficiaries as well as by gender and age class wherever possible. (maximum 400 words)*

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1. **Project description** (describe step by step activities that will lead to the final result, describe what kind of resources are needed in order to implement your project. Who will be the consumer of your service/products? 1-page maximum)

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1. **Choose which objectives project addresses and** describe what will be achieved through the project, describe an outcome - effect or change that the project is supposed to cause (½ -page maximum)

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| --- | --- |
| Objective 1 | Objective 1: Conservation of ecological and cultural values  • Conservation of rangelands  • Conservation of wildlife  • Conservation of water resources |
| Objective 2 | Development of livelihoods based on sustainable use of ecosystem services  • Development of agriculture and livestock sectors  • Development of tourism sector  • Development of safe supplies of drinking water |
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1. **Justification how the project contributes to the objectives of BRVPL** (1/3 of the page)

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1. **Socio-economic and environmental impacts** (describe how will your social or economic conditions be improved as a result of the project and what kind of positive effect it can have to the environment/nature in which you live or work. ½ -page maximum)

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1. **The project result will last for** 
   1. 1 year
   2. 3-5
   3. More than 5
2. **How you will see the future/sustainability of your project** (1/3 of the page)

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1. **Project budget**

Total value of the project:

Requested amount:

Co-financing from the applicant:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Description of costs (material, services, labor) | Quantity | Unit price | Total price | Requested amount | Co-financing |
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