

ELIMINATING THE FOREST ENERGY CRISIS BY SUSTAINABLE USE OF BIOMASS

POLICY PAPER SUMMARY



2016

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Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Georgian National Platform is an association of local and international non-commercial legal entities registered in Georgia, aiming to promote and implement the goals set by the Joint Declarations of the Prague, Warsaw and Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summits and the EU-Georgia Association Agreement of European Neighborhood Policy and other joint events.

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Summary

Mass scale exploitation of forests for social purposes in Georgia, a process that has been taking place for the last 25 years, has brought the Country to acute ecological, social-economic and energy challenges.

According to research, conducted with methodologies agreed upon with the forest management authorities of Georgia, the in total 400.000 families living in the regions of Georgia (with the exclusion of Adjara) consume more than 2,400,000 M³ firewood. To meet this demand, the National Forest Agency allocates 600,000 M³ firewood resource annually, enough to satisfy only 25% of entire demanded quantity. The rest of the 300,000 families are forced to illegally secure the vitally necessary 1,800,000 M³ of firewood. Additionally, public bodies and the private sector consume a large amount of firewood as well (hotels, restaurants, etc.).

Firewood may be the second most important energy resource in the Country, but it doesn't clearly fall under the regulation area of the Ministry of Energy.

Without swift and effective state activities, forest degradation will become irreversible, which will lead to natural disasters, empty regions from population, and increase the risk of leaving population without a heating resource. A harsh deficit of firewood is already present throughout various regions of Georgia.

Eliminating the firewood deficit is a complex problem, to be solved in conjunction with improved forest and environmental, energy, social, and regional development policies. The solution requires waste-management and a rural-agricultural cooperation program. Furthermore, an environment that supports businesses working with renewable energy technologies needs to be fostered.

The problem could be alleviated by working in the following two directions:

- Reducing firewood demand by increased efficiency, which depends on rational use of firewood, introduction of more efficient stoves, better heat-insulation of buildings and raising awareness within society.
- Replacing firewood with alternative heat resources, such as a combined use of natural gas and non-liquid bio-fuels -pellets, briquettes or chips.

For this purpose, it is necessary to:

- Design a state program for the provision of heat resources to detail short-term and medium-term plans for crisis management;
- Establish a strategy for bio-mass use in Georgia, which will become a part of the Country's energy strategy;
- Introduce requirements to stimulate businesses that utilize renewable energies and technologies as one of its priorities by the existing business support programs (Produce in Georgia, StartUP Georgia, other programs and grants that support innovation);
- Fully take into the account that firewood is the second most important energy resource in Georgia in the Ministry of Energy's Energy Strategy and National Renewable Action Plan elaboration process;
- Ensure firewood gathering is an organized process and stricter control illegal provision of firewood by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and the National Forest Agency. An effective implementation mechanism could be to take responsibility for the sustainable provision of firewood resources, its farming and distribution; also, by producing heating products from leftover firewood biomass in the woods.

To complete these tasks, a governmental coordination council must be established, in which local municipalities and government agencies participate, coordinated by the State Economic Council apparatus.

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