

June 2013



Connecting on environmental issues in North & South Caucasus

INSIGHTS FROM 36 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH JOURNALISTS,
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCHOLARS
IN ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, GEORGIA AND RUSSIA

Internews
EUROPE

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About Internews Europe

INTERNEWS EUROPE is an international development organisation specialising in supporting independent media, freedom of information and free expression around the globe. The vast majority of our programmes are targeted at crisis-hit populations, emerging democracies and some of the world's poorest countries.

This report is part of an Internews Europe project to improve the enabling environment for climate change response, biodiversity protection and ecosystems management in the Northern and Southern Caucasus by addressing the specific lack of high quality information available to the media, public and policy makers.

We believe access to information and resilient local media are key to good governance, human rights, and conflict resolution, and are effective responses to humanitarian crises and public understanding of critical issues such as climate change. Internews' media development and information access projects ultimately enable people to hold their governments to account, to develop tolerant and prosperous communities and to rebuild lives and livelihoods following destabilising conflict or humanitarian disasters.

The power of new technologies to analyse, distribute and publish data and information is creating significant opportunities to support our beneficiaries.

Our programmes increasingly amplify the reach and impact of local media through the innovative deployment of new digital technologies (Internet, mobile, and social media) to create dynamic and inclusive local information systems.

Every year our work empowers and builds the capacity of dozens of independent media organisations and hundreds of local media professionals in some of the world's most challenging environments.

We are creating a new generation of professionals that combine a solid grounding in sound, ethical journalism with skills in the new digital communication technologies to support their local citizens and consumers.

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1. Foreword

THE CAUCASUS REGION is an area of huge environmental significance it comprises a variety of ecosystems centered around its soaring alpine mountains, from dense forests in the north to subtropical micro-climates in the west and south and near-desert in the southeast. Each of the four countries that this report focuses on has a diverse range of ecosystems inside their borders.

These precious natural resources are under increased pressure. Economic development, industrialisation, population growth, the effects of global climate change and increased tourism are all leaving their mark on the Caucasus region's bio-diversity and natural resources.

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund's **2003 summary of biodiversity in the Caucasus** is clear: "Most strict nature reserves and national parks, particularly in the southern Caucasus, are too small to guarantee long-term biodiversity conservation. Economic problems have resulted in an increase in poaching, illegal forest cutting and grazing in protected areas where the protection regime is not always enforced. Buffer zones are often non-existent, so consequences of resource use and human pressures outside reserves spill over the borders and impact protected ecosystems. Furthermore, the existing protected areas system is not entirely representative of the full range of biodiversity in the hotspot."

There is widespread concern that governments in the region are falling short of fulfilling their responsibility to protect bio-diversity and natural resources, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)



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[HTTP://WWW.GRIDA.NO/GRAPHICSLIB/DETAIL/THE-CAUCASUS-ECOREGION-TOPOGRAPHIC-MAP_A6B6](http://www.grida.no/graphicslib/detail/the-caucasus-ecoregion-topographic-map_a6b6)

Red List (of 2003) identifies 50 species of globally threatened animals and one plant in the Caucasus. These concerns radiate to local governance and the responsibility of local authorities to ensure that their own policies and practices, as well as those of the private sector, meet their national obligations in accord with the international agreements their governments have signed.

Internews' work around the world has demonstrated over many years that high-quality journalism that highlights national and global environmental issues in a professional and impartial way can improve public debate about these issues, and in turn hold governments to account in order to protect fragile ecosystems and manage their natural resources wisely.

The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the potential role that media and journalism can play in improving public understanding and public policy

on environmental issues in the Caucasus region. It set out to identify some of the critical challenges faced by journalists and media professionals in attempting to report on the environment, and to provide some concrete recommendations for mechanisms and steps to address those challenges.

Quantitative studies on media coverage of climate change by Max Boykoff, at Oxford University,¹ noted that although documenting causality between media coverage and a specific policy response is not always possible, there are nevertheless *'abundant instances of this (direct linkage), as many in government monitor press coverage as a proxy for public discourse and possible pressure;'* and *'that improved reporting with greater specificity and contextualisation through the combined efforts of journalists, editors and scientists would help to more effectively engage the public, and would widen the spectrum of possibility for appropriate action.'*

By commissioning an independent research organisation, Japaradze & Associates, to interview 36 experts from the field of environmental activism, academia and media, Internews is able to draw on significant data to present new findings and make recommendations.

The study shows that the state of professional media reporting in the region has reached a kind of impasse – mainstream media clearly lack the professional skills and editorial commitment needed to tackle environmental issues, which can be complex and require time to acquire the necessary technical knowledge and skills. Most importantly, journalists and editors rarely investigate stories that may challenge the ruling classes – politicians and big businesses – or their own media houses, which often depend on

governments for revenue and licensing. This impasse creates an 'information void' about what is arguably one of the most pressing socio-economic issues that the peoples of Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the states of southern Russia face.

The study also finds some small signs of optimism. The Internet can serve as a vital information source and is increasingly accessed by activists, journalists, experts and members of the public. There is also the potential for online media to raise the bar on environmental reporting and challenge the TV, radio and print media. This study also found a consensus amongst all those interviewed that there is now an increased public appetite for news and information about the environment, and a growing expectation that more transparency would follow.

Not all the countries are undergoing the same challenges and changes – and as well as drawing some common conclusions relevant across the region, this study also looks at specific findings related to each country in the relevant sections.

Internews hopes this study will draw attention to the need, largely ignored so far, to work closely with the media and other partners in the region to make a real improvement in the quality of environmental media coverage over the next few years.

James Fahn
Executive Director,
Earth Journalism Network

¹ Boykoff, M., Nature Reports Climate Change 21 February 2008; <http://www.nature.com/climate/2008/0803/full/climate.2008.14.html>

Study Methodology

This report presents the results of a baseline study of journalism and journalistic coverage of environmental issues in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 36 experts across the four target countries during April-May 2013 on the understanding that interviewees would remain anonymous (A copy of the discussion questionnaire is provided in Appendix A). All interviews were conducted with the support of locally contracted research firms with the overall analysis completed by Japaridze & Associates. Interviewed experts included journalists working on environmental issues, environmental activists, and environmental scholars (More detailed descriptions of study participants are provided in Appendix B).

Key Objectives

The main objectives of the baseline study were:

- Assessment of the quantity and quality of journalism on environmental issues and of the general media context
- Identification of key environmental issues/concerns and assessment of environmental regulation
- Identification of key stakeholders in society on environmental issues
- Assessment of the level of cooperation between journalists, environmental activists, and environmental scholars in each country and across the region
- Identification of shared environmental concerns which might be a catalyst for cross-regional cooperation
- Development of recommendations that could help increase public awareness and understanding of environmental issues

2. Key recommendations

Invest in increased nationwide coverage of environmental issues and media professionalism across all media platforms

Each country must invest in targeted mechanisms for ensuring the production or publication of high quality, objective, diverse environmental reporting. Due to the wide viewership of leading television channels a weekly TV show dedicated to environmental news and analysis would vastly improve public awareness of the increasingly urgent issues in their own environment, and help build credibility of TV, which currently lacks independence from government and private business agendas.

Conduct more targeted, specialised training on effective environmental reporting

This study found the level of environmental reporting in the North & South Caucasus, with a few notable exceptions, is currently extremely poor. Journalists lack background knowledge on environmental issues and produce biased, un-substantiated reports. They may need specific training to overcome a culture of self-censorship, and to avoid criticising the government or the big businesses on which media outlets often depend. It is essential that a new generation of journalists and editors gain the skills to become specialised in environmental reporting, distill complex information and analysis and explain to their audiences the importance of the issues they are covering.

Build on dynamism of online information initiatives

The study found that the field of online information is a more dynamic, trusted, and credible source of information about environmental issues than the current mainstream or more traditional media. It is important that this fledgling information system is supported as it can significantly raise the bar for environmental reporting, and could challenge TV, radio and print media to do better.

Begin education on the environment in schools early

The experts that were interviewed were unanimous in highlighting the importance of environmental education to raise the environmental consciousness among all citizens, and that it is not the role of media alone to raise awareness. The suggestions included offering a class specifically on protecting the environment from pre-kindergarten through to high school. A weekly environmental programme specifically for children would also be beneficial, as well as environmental literature being available in both print and online in public libraries.



Governments must be held accountable for improving environmental standards

The study found that experts believe that their government ministries are responsible for improving environmental standards in their own country. This includes responsibility for sufficient staff numbers and ensuring enforcement of existing legislation.

Donors need to invest in creating sustainable links and greater levels of information sharing between environmental stakeholders

It was found that other than a few exceptions, cooperation between stakeholders has been extremely rare. These stakeholders include environmental activists, the general public, media, environmental academia and the private sector. If this cooperation can be advanced the possibility of public engagement will increase. Businesses could be rewarded for responsible environmental practices through public awareness campaigns in the media.

Establish a Regional Environmental Council

Although significant cross issues exist in this region interviewed experts felt cross border cooperation is essential due to the volume of environmental resources between neighbouring countries. To this end, this study recommends the formation of a Regional Environmental Council initiated by the Ministries of Environment and to include all stakeholder representatives on both the local and regional level from each target country. It was also suggested that donors could fund research projects that would facilitate collaboration between academics across the region and be reported on by nationwide media in multiple countries.

3. Analysis of in-depth Interviews



3.1. Media Context and Quality of Journalism on Environmental Issues

All interviewed experts are avid news and information consumers, following news about their own countries and news about developments abroad. Their media mix is diverse, including domestic and international media. While having access to all media platforms, their preferred news medium is the Internet, because of the ease of accessing news and information online and also because of the diversity of views and perspectives one can obtain. Experts recognised that their media choices

did not reflect media use patterns by populations at large, which primarily follow news through nationwide television stations.

In Armenia, experts listed a number of Armenian and Russian language news portals and social websites they use to access information. The sources that were repeatedly mentioned included Azatutyun, Lragir, A1+, Facebook, and YouTube. All experts criticised nationwide TV media (state and privately owned broadcasters) and print media for biased political news reporting; some experts had stopped regular TV use for this reason and would only watch a specific TV program if it were mentioned in social media blogs, using YouTube or Ucom service for viewing. For environmental news all

experts highlighted www.ecolor.am, www.hetq.am, and some added www.168.am and www.lurer.com to the list of online media with environmental coverage. Experts also spoke of environmental reporting on www.econews.am, but environmental activists felt that their coverage was more superficial and biased, largely depicting views in favour of Armenia's government and the business sector. From TV channels in Armenia, experts noted only occasional appearances of environment-focused news on Kentron TV (privately owned nationwide television), ATV (privately owned television available in Yerevan and nearby regions), and Erkir Media (privately owned nationwide broadcaster). In the latter two cases, interviewed experts found reports to contain heavy political undertones and less emphasis on actual environmental concerns, while Kentron TV's coverage was deemed more balanced and professional.

Interviewed experts in Azerbaijan, similar to the views expressed by experts in Armenia and Georgia, believe that low-cost entertainment shows dominate national broadcast media. They were not satisfied with the quality of informative programmes on television, emphasising a lack of objective news coverage in most news programs. Armenian, Georgian, Azerbaijani and Russian experts spoke of a high degree of politicisation of nationwide media and a lack of balanced and analytical news programs; instead, superficial and scandalous coverage dominate. Armenian, Georgian, and Azerbaijani experts felt that the presence of large entertainment content was meant to entertain and pacify the viewers. Experts across the four countries found the print media market to be more diverse, although they said that professional and politically independent publications are rare.

The lack of environmental reporting in nationwide media (both state and privately owned) and the shortage of professional environmental journalism was a shared feature across the four countries. Experts spoke of limited to no coverage of environmental topics across widely watched nationwide media, which they felt contributed to the populations' low awareness of environmental problems. In Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, experts could not recall a regularly produced programme on nationwide television channels dedicated to educating viewers about environment, biodiversity, or the impact of climate change. Instead, they recalled occasional and brief reports depicting environmental disasters, with no analysis of what caused them, or stories about developments that have a negative environmental impact with a positive frame

and tone, largely promising job creation and benefits through tax collection.

Russian experts found nationwide Russian media reports on environmental topics to be limited to environmental crisis stories abroad, echoing the views of experts in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Any Russia-specific environmental coverage is either cautious or one-sided, due to the lack of independence of nationwide media. Everyone believed nationwide media was controlled by either the Russian government or businesses. Russian experts recalled how a critical story about Sakhalin oil production appeared for viewers in Sakhalin, but never reached audiences in Moscow, due to direct pressure from the Russian energy company Gazprom to remove the report from a nationwide broadcast.

In contrast to nationwide media in Russia, Russian experts believed local media outlets have a greater degree of independence and environmental coverage is available more frequently in the local press. For example, experts said that Krasnodar's local print media often carries environmental reports about Sochi. *MK Kubanj* publishes environmental reports twice a month, basing their reports on materials found in online environmental blogs and feeds provided by North Caucasus Environmental Watch. Some experts recalled coverage of environmental problems in Sochi on a local independent TV station, *Maks-TV*. Russian experts also noted occasional environmental coverage in "oppositional" nationwide press, such as *Novaya Gazeta*. Some Russian experts also spoke of radio programmes on scientific issues that contain some environmental content, but noted the low reach of those programs. Independent television stations, e.g. *Dozhd' TV*, also occasionally cover environmental developments, typically when an environmental story is related to a public protest.

In all four countries experts emphasised the important role of the Internet in providing access to news and information, including news and information on the environment. Russian experts highlighted the importance of online environmental blogs that provide detailed information about environmental concerns in Sochi and the North Caucasus region in general. Russian experts named www.rufox.ru, www.livekuban.ru, www.sochi-24.ru, and www.kavkaz-uzel.ru as useful sources of news about Sochi and North Caucasus. In addition, experts underlined the important work North Caucasus Environmental Watch (www.wenc.org) plays in disseminating information through news feeds and list-serves about the environment across the North Caucasus.

All interviewed experts, even interviewed journalists, hoped to see better educated and trained journalists in general and wished to see more media professionals dedicated to environmental news reporting.

“I would like to see more professionalisation of journalists in environmental reporting. Analytical environmental reporting is practically missing in regional media. Most journalists who write about the environment write on many other topics as well and I can tell that their understanding of environmental issues is not deep.” [RUSSIA, EXPERT]

“I am very disappointed in our television. We have low quality entertainment programs, soap operas. I think this is intentionally done to turn our people into less informed individuals. Our media holds us back. Armenian media should be more independent.” [ARMENIA, SCHOLAR]

“Central and Federal media outlets show life in a positive way, all is well in Russia. Print media sometimes provides environmental stories, but you find this work mostly in oppositional newspapers, like Novaya Gazeta. You can tell that environmental focus is not a priority. You find environmental links in the stories that deal with social problems in Russia.” [RUSSIA, NGO]

“On Russian main federal channels you get an official line. I know that there are serious environmental concerns about Sochi from online reports provided by environmental activists. Yet, our nationwide TV reports that all environmental concerns are being addressed. Honestly, I have not

noticed an environmental story focused on the North Caucasus region in the federal media in a very long time. Ria-Novosty focuses on environment and provides environmental-economic index data about Russia's regions, rating the degree of environmentally sustainable economic development across Russia. Sochi-24.ru is a daily online newspaper on Sochi. I find a lot of environmental reporting about Caucasus there and on kavkaz-uzel.ru.” [RUSSIA, SCHOLAR]

“Russian federal media have very little coverage of environmental stories. They show global environmental crisis, floods, droughts, or our government officials making oratory statements on the environment. I have noticed self-censorship in Russian media in environmental coverage. In Sochi an independent TV station, Maks-TV [Макс-ТВ], shows critical reports on the environmental crisis in Sochi.” [RUSSIA, NGO]

“It is not affordable to have one journalist focused entirely on environmental topics; we cover many issues and in the end produce fragmented coverage.” [GEORGIA, JOURNALIST]

“Kamersant newspaper has a good journalist who covers environmental issues. But, overall, in Russia, I am not aware of more than four journalists who professionally cover environmental development of Russia. We have a shortage of specialised environmental journalists.” [RUSSIA, SCHOLAR]

“In Sochi the quality of media reports on environmental issues is of mediocre or poor quality. I see such environmental coverage online and sometimes in print media and on Maks-TV. Media must promote awareness of environmental problems in our region, otherwise people remain disengaged. Media must consolidate our public around the importance of protecting our environment and biodiversity. We are faced with serious environmental problems in Sochi.” [RUSSIA, SCHOLAR]

“All TV stations are the same, all offer entertainment directed at the same group of people who only want entertainment. What about people who work, people who are educated, people who are scholars, people who want to learn more, their needs are not met at all by our TV stations.” [AZERBAIJAN, SCHOLAR]

“We cannot talk about independence of media in Azerbaijan, which is a problem across all former Soviet republics. The media are not independent from business or government support; we don't have developed institutions that help guarantee independence of our media.” [AZERBAIJAN, NGO]

“Internet plays a unique role. Internet provides space for an open exchange of information and ideas. I regularly read environmental stories on rufox.ru, which is an informational-entertainment online website. I also love to follow www.livekuban.ru online journal.” [RUSSIA, NGO]

“North Caucasus Environmental Watch group maintains a good website – ewnc.org. They disseminate information through their network. In addition, there are many bloggers who write on environmental issues. I like to use ecoreporter.ru site as it addresses environmental topics across Russia.” [RUSSIA, JOURNALIST]

“It does not make sense for the same journalist to write about sports and culture and healthcare. We need specialisation of journalists. Coverage of environmental issues is very difficult and requires specialised preparation.” [GEORGIA, NGO]

“I stopped watching Armenian TV. If I see a reference to an interesting television program on Facebook, only then do I look this program up, I try to find this program using Ucom TV archival service. RUSSIA, NGO]

3.2. Environmental Problems and Public Awareness

ISSUES OF CONCERN

Not a single expert felt that the environment in their country was well protected. Instead, they expressed concern for the quality of air, water and soil. Across all four countries, experts found illegal hunting, illegal logging, and illegal fishing to be widespread. Loss of forests and parks due to construction projects in urban and suburban areas also emerged as a significant concern. In addition, experts considered low standards of household waste management to pose a significant environmental hazard. Georgia, Armenia, and Russia lack proper waste processing and storage facilities. In Azerbaijan, a modern waste processing and storage facility was recently developed for the city of Baku, but this is not sufficient to address the waste management needs across the country.

In Azerbaijan and Russia, experts felt inadequate resources have been invested in environmental safeguards and clean up operations at oil and gas extraction and processing facilities, as corporations are driven by profit, paying little regard for the local environment. In Armenia, experts levied similarly harsh criticism towards the extractive industry corporations that mine for precious and semiprecious metals across the country. In addition, Armenian experts voiced concerns about small scale hydro-power projects, while Georgians feared that new large-scale hydro-power plants under consideration in Georgia would bring more harm than good.

Experts expressed concern for the low safety standards of drinking and irrigation waters. This concern was particularly acute among interviewed experts in Azerbaijan and to some extent in Russia. Air pollution from cars and factories also emerged as a common environmental problem across the four countries.

In Russia and Armenia, many experts expressed concern about the outdated industrial facilities that are still operational and represent a serious environmental hazard to the environment.

Across all four countries experts recognised the challenge their countries face between the need for economic development and preservation of the environment.

“Our nature is abused. In Krasnodar and in Karachaevo-Cherkasia the damage to the environment has reached criminal proportions. Forests are disappearing. In Sochi since the preparation for the Winter Olympics has started we have had a complete negligence of the environment, starting from construction waste being dumped into our national parks and rivers and ending with the destruction of our forests.” [RUSSIA, NGO]

“In Vladikavkaz there is the Electrocyнк factory and local youth groups protested against it. Local government representatives explained that this factory has to function because it provides tax revenue and jobs. Clearly, pollution from this factory harms the environment and public health. This is a challenging question, how to combine industrial production (exploitation of nature) and protection of the environment. The situation is catastrophic: solid waste is visible in and near urban areas. There is no recycling. Waste is not processed, instead it is burned. Trash is dumped into our rivers, roadways and along the Black Sea shore.” [RUSSIA, SCHOLAR]

“Water pollution stems from multiple causes, including chemical waste from factories, agricultural production, household waste, broken down sanitary systems, pollution from oil production and transportation. The Black Sea is in danger, there is not much life left in it. Oil pollution floats along the shore.” [RUSSIA, NGO]

“Our cities are overcrowded with cars. Air pollution is terrible.”

[RUSSIA, SCHOLAR]

“There is practically no trout to be found in the rivers of the North Caucasus due to illegal fishing -- fishing using electric probes. In Dagestan, illegal fishing for sturgeon is widespread.”

[RUSSIA, SCHOLAR]

“A large private residential section in Sochi has no sewage system and the household waste flows underground and seeps into our rivers.”

[RUSSIA, NGO]

“The sewage system is either non-existent or broken down.”

[GEORGIA, JOURNALIST]

“Neither our air, nor our waters—Kura or Araks or the Caspian Sea, are protected. Many of our environmental problems stem from oil and gas production in Azerbaijan. Environmental movement is growing very slowly in our country and yet the effects of climate change are increasingly noticeable. We’ll have more desert. We’ll have droughts. We’ll lose biodiversity. We’ll have floods.”

[AZERBAIJAN, SCHOLAR]

“In Tbilisi, we have two large waste sites where for years all the waste from Tbilisi was carried. Now they are closed down, but there is absolutely no barrier between the waste material and soil. Another serious problem is the hazardous waste from the hospitals. Everything is thrown into

regular outside trash bins. The second largest problem is an aggressive development of hydropower plants. People were expecting that the Georgian government policy towards this issue would change after the 2012 elections, but as we see now, the policy of promoting hydropower plant development is still advancing.

[GEORGIA, JOURNALIST]

“We need a real assessment of the degree of toxic content across Georgia. We don’t know what kind of environment we live in. Before we do anything about deciding how to protect our environment, we need a comprehensive baseline assessment of our environment, to include the soil, air, water, and food. We need to develop laboratories across Georgia, with proper technologies, to test the quality of our environment and make this information public.”

[GEORGIA, SCHOLAR]

“Armenia’s environment is in great danger. The situation is catastrophic.”

[ARMENIA, NGO]

“Construction has taken over Yerevan and we are losing what little green space we have. Construction dust is everywhere. Another problem in Armenia is the widespread development of small scale hydro-power plants. Armenia is blessed with many natural resources, however, the extraction and mining industries in Armenia bring many environmental problems, damaging our environment and our health. We need to start

thinking about what Armenia's future will look like. Who will want to live here?"

[ARMENIA, NGO]

PUBLIC AWARENESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Across the four countries the interviewed experts believed that knowledge of environmental legislation was weak even among the expert community and practically absent among the wider public. Experts believed that if citizens were better informed about environmental laws they would be more able to protect their rights and the environment. Experts felt that the general public tends to get involved in environmental activism when an environmental problem directly impacts them. As examples, many experts named construction projects that damaged urban parks, the appearance of waste dumps in urban areas, or development of new industrial facilities with inadequate environmental protection; such instances would garner some public outcry.

Russian experts spoke about widespread public apathy, a sense that their individual actions do not influence the country's developments. As a result, they noted, the public are disengaged from environmental issues. Experts from Georgia and Azerbaijan also spoke about the lack of citizen engagement on environmental issues, while interviewed experts in Armenia noted some improvement in this area, which they attributed to the activism of the environmental non-governmental sector in Armenia. In Russia, experts also highlighted the important work of environmental watch groups in protecting Russia's environment. Overall, however, experts felt the immense socio-economic problems across the four countries have placed environmental concerns as a low priority for the population; citizens tend to be more concerned about jobs and their daily subsistence.

"If our citizens had an idea about Russia's environmental legislation and international environmental conventions, they would be more able to defend their rights and protect their environment. They would be able to judge better whether the construction project next to their home can be allowed to move forward or not,

whether the trees being cut down in their yard can be removed or not. When citizens become active in the area of environmental protection, they tend to focus on their own, immediate, very local issues. We try to change this, we try to expand their focus so that they join other citizens, but we have not been successful." [RUSSIA, NGO]

"We don't have many active citizens concerned with the environment in the North Caucasus. There are few enthusiasts, some teachers, some doctors, some writers, etc. The majority of our population does not pay attention to this; our society is passive and goes with some inertia. Most people think this way, "it does not matter, no matter what we do we won't change anything." [RUSSIA, SCHOLAR]

"Citizens don't even know when they burn grass they violate our laws and harm the environment. Our agricultural workers burn dry grass during Spring. [RUSSIA, SCHOLAR]

"I think only environmental activists and specialists are active and informed. Common citizens show very little interest. While environmental activism is slowly growing, still, public awareness and citizen responsibility to protect Russia's environment is weak. People tend to go to a public protest only if an issue directly affects them. [RUSSIA, JOURNALIST]

“Public awareness of environmental issues is very superficial. The importance of environment is not part of our education in schools or at homes. This explains why our country’s environment is so unprotected.

[ARMENIA, JOURNALIST]

“If our society had environmental consciousness, would our people be throwing trash into our rivers, would they be cutting down trees, would they illegally take over our parks to facilitate construction projects, would they illegally hunt, would they use electricity to fish in Sevan? [ARMENIA, NGO]

“When I was in school during the Soviet period I had no environmental education. The same problem exists today. Why are we throwing rubbish in the street when right around us there are bins? Plastic bags are everywhere. Environmental education has to happen from early childhood. This is essential.” [GEORGIA, JOURNALISM]

“Our public libraries have no books on the environment. Our schools do not teach students about the importance of protecting one’s environment and biodiversity. Our media does not have programs about the environment. These are the main reasons why our society is so passive and why our own citizens harm Azerbaijan’s environment and do not demand environmentally sound policies from our government.” [AZERBAIJAN, SCHOLAR]

“Armenian environmental activists and youth groups are increasingly active in monitoring environmental issues in Armenia. When you witness how your water, your soil, your forests are abused, you know those that abuse these resources will not live in Armenia tomorrow, but we do and we cannot let this happen. Today our youth may not understand the environmental concerns on the level of experts, but they already know that we cannot live the way we live and this is some progress.” [ARMENIA, JOURNALIST]

3.3. Assessment of Environmental Regulation

The opinion of experts was divided on the quality of environmental legal frameworks in the South Caucasus countries. Some felt environmental laws were well developed, while others noted existing laws were insufficient and needed refinement. All interviewed experts in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan were in agreement that the environmental legal framework was too complex even for legal experts to understand and impossible for the general public to follow.

In contrast, Russian experts were unanimous in their criticism of the quality of environmental legislation in Russia. They spoke of frequent changes in the laws that reflected the needs of Russian business interests and paid little to no attention to environmental concerns associated with Russia's industrial development. To illustrate how business interests drive environmental legislation in Russia, several experts spoke of a legal amendment under consideration by the Russian Duma permitting the dumping of deep sea drilling waste at the drilling sites. In addition, Russian experts recalled legislative amendments and government decrees lifting environmental restrictions to facilitate the development of infrastructure projects, e.g., to host Winter Olympics in Sochi or the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Vladivostok. Russian experts criticised the Russian Federal Government's decision to place environmental protection functions within the Ministry of Natural Resources, as not progressive. This restructuring gave both control over natural resource extraction and authority over protection of Russia's environment to the same organisation.

In Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia experts spoke of widespread corruption being a factor rendering laws, including environmental regulation, useless. Corruption did not emerge as a problem in Georgia, although, Georgian experts also considered Georgia's environmental legislation ineffective.

“Public servants build their vacation homes along the Black Sea coast in violation of environmental protection regulations. Look how construction projects have devastated the natural habitat in the Imereti valley between the Mzymta and Psou rivers. Genetically

modified products are grown in the Krasnodar region now. This is illegal and highly damaging to the environment.” [RUSSIA, NGO]

“Sochi is a site of a complete ecological nightmare due to the ongoing construction projects in preparation for the Sochi Winter Olympics. Construction debris is dumped in the Sochi nature reserve or is driven out of Sochi and dumped in other regional territories. Boxwood forests are being cut down. This is how the “Zero Waste” Sochi Winter Olympics policy is being implemented. Construction waste is dumped into rivers, increasing the danger of floods. Rivers Mzimta and Shakhe are practically ruined.” [RUSSIA, JOURNALIST]

“Anti-environmental legislative activity must stop. The government must take the protection of Russia's environment seriously. Russia's federal government should promote sustainable economic development.” [RUSSIA, NGO]

“Most of our laws provide legal frameworks, but lack detailed guidelines. We tried to analyse Azerbaijan's legal codes on forests. A 300 page long book was produced as a result. A common person cannot sit down and read this and determine what is right or wrong conduct.” [AZERBAIJAN, NGO]

“In order to hold the Olympics in Sochi, Russian government changed many laws to permit the construction of different buildings inside of the Sochi nature reserve. Several Federal Laws stopped being applied to Sochi. Similar developments took place in Vladivostok in preparation for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit. The same problem is now occurring in the Moscow region.” [RUSSIA, SCHOLAR]

“Georgia has rather underdeveloped environmental legislation and weak environmental regulation. Clear environmental guidelines are missing to guide individual behaviour. This is a key problem from which stems our reality: the environment in Georgia is not protected at all.” [GEORGIA, SCHOLAR]

“Our laws are normal, but they are being ignored. Environmental laws are not enforced and corruption is one big reason for this. Armenia is a small country and it is easy to use kinship contacts to avoid punishment for the violation of the law. Look, we have a good law that clearly states that fishing in Lake Sevan is prohibited. This law is constantly ignored.” [ARMENIA, SCHOLAR]

“Our laws are evaluated by legal experts from Europe ever since Armenia started the process of deeper integration with the European Union. I think on paper our environmental legislation is sound. The problem lies elsewhere: laws are ignored. Do you think that the mining companies in Armenia do not know that their activities are violating Armenia’s environmental codes? Of course they know, but they don’t care, they are above the law.” [ARMENIA, SCHOLAR]

“Governmental decrees often contradict Armenia’s environmental legislation and companies follow decrees that are written around their interests. Our laws mean nothing. Our citizens don’t know their legal rights and their responsibilities. I see this when I travel across the country.” [ARMENIA, JOURNALIST]

“Legislative process in our country works well in terms of taking into account expert opinions on new drafts of laws under consideration. I have participated in such processes many times. The problem is that the laws we draft and ratify are not enforced.” [ARMENIA, SCHOLAR]

3.4. Stakeholders and the Level of Domestic Cooperation

Most experts described the current level of cooperation in their respective countries between media, environmental scholars, and environmental activists as too limited in scope. Expert interviews revealed such cooperation was the weakest in Azerbaijan and Russia and a bit more advanced in Armenia; Georgia fell in the middle. Georgian and Azerbaijani experts felt such cooperation was donor driven and lacked impact.

A few experts could name examples of positive cooperation between environmental stakeholders that developed naturally. For example, some Azerbaijani experts recalled an example when environmental activists in Shirvan brought to the media's attention the problem of low water levels in Shirvan's lake and this rare cooperation prompted local government officials to pay attention to this issue. Some environmental scholars in Azerbaijan used an example of their interviews for Azerbaijani media as an illustration of the cooperation between media and environmental scholars. However, these scholars noted that such relations were not frequent and the journalistic quality was rather low.

Russian experts emphasised the important role of environmental watch groups in Russia who on a weekly basis disseminate environmental news to Russian media, which, they considered successful in mobilising strong environmental activism around the issue of environmental protection in Sochi. Environmental scholars in Russia were not always seen as working to protect Russia's environment. The interviewed experts felt the Russian environmental scholars were dependent on the support of the Russian government or the business sector; as a consequence, Russian environmental scholars were sometimes led to produce biased environmental assessment reports when conducting environmental impact assessments of the proposed industrial or construction projects. In Russia, much like in the South Caucasus countries, interviewed experts felt their countries do not have many qualified independent environmental scholars and identified this factor as a serious problem.

All interviewed experts strongly felt that without cooperation between relevant environmental stakeholders to include government, media, nongovernmental sector, environmental scholars, and citizens the protection of the environment and biodiversity will be ineffective. In addition, some experts

highlighted that without the participation and buy-in from the private sector it will be difficult to advance environmental safety.

“Businesses do not care about environmental protection and does not invest the resources into the prevention of environmental damage. Our government does not sanction anti-environmental business activity and our environment remains unprotected. Aggressive industrialisation is damaging Russia's environment. Our wildlife and nature is threatened by unregulated industrialisation and urban development activity.” [RUSSIA, NGO]

“Citizens are also responsible, but good examples should follow from the government and our citizens don't have such examples. Instead, they see how the public servants build their own vacation homes on nature reserves.” [RUSSIA, SCHOLAR]

“Some scholars are biased due to their ties to the businesses or government. Either out of their own will or pressure placed on them they produce reports that show an absence of negative environmental consequences from certain production projects. Russia has few independent environmental scholars, because they depend on funding either from the State or business. Once a week I receive environmental news updates from environmental watch groups. This I consider an important example of cooperation between environmental activists and media.” [RUSSIA, JOURNALIST]

“There is no systematic cooperation between media, environmental activists, and environmental scholars in Russia.” [RUSSIA, SCHOLAR]

“To save Russia’s environment, we need to attract many and diverse groups of people to this issue: volunteers, environmentalists, public officials. We need to draw business into the process. Businesses is slowly starting to recognise the importance of social responsibility. For example, Vimpelcom recently organised a set of round tables with environmentalists. I am not sure what will come of this, but the initiative is encouraging.” [RUSSIA, JOURNALIST]

“I looked at all dissertations related to ecology and mining of natural resources since 1960 and I found that not a single dissertation was written on this topic in the last 20 year period. We don’t have real scholarship, real studies in this area. There are general monographs, newspaper articles at times. I looked at the archives of the Ministry of Ecology and was stunned to find so little. No works on climate, no works on heavy metal extraction, nothing, nothing, nothing. Azerbaijan needs to raise environmental scholarship.” [AZERBAIJAN, SCHOLAR]

“Environmental activism by our youth is under threat. Businesses try to stop them. Just look at the court case against Yeghia Nersesian by the Armenian mining company. Interests of our business and our environmental activists clash.” [ARMENIA, NGO]

I never had a problem in receiving information from a nongovernmental organisation. I find folks at the Green Alternative and the Centre for Energy Effectiveness to be very helpful. There are less frequent relations with environmental scholars. Only recently I started to reach out to professors at our universities, but this is not an effective strategy as it is hard to find environmental scholars. [GEORGIA, JOURNALIST]

3.5. Cross-border Cooperation

In most cases the discussion of cross-border cooperation among environmental stakeholders lacked enthusiasm. Experts could not name a single ongoing cross-border environmental cooperation project across the Caucasus region. Instead, experts from the South Caucasus recalled how countries in the region do not enter into bilateral or multilateral agreements that would obligate them to share responsibility for environmental protection.

A couple of Russian experts who were interviewed recalled cooperation around the North Caucasus wildlife reserve issue between activists and scholars from Sochi and the North Caucasus republics and their Abkhaz colleagues, although they recognised that political tensions between Georgia and Russia make cross-border cooperation very difficult. Most Russian experts' long-term outlook excluded collaboration between Russian and Georgian environmental stakeholders even on mutually beneficial environmental projects. They felt without the political will for such collaboration, the ties between environmental stakeholders between Georgia and Russia will have a casual character, on the level of meetings where only information exchange takes place and no action follows. One Russian expert, however, felt that with the support of international organisations cross-border cooperation around the issue of the North Caucasus wildlife nature reserve and the environmental protection of the Black Sea basin were ongoing efforts.

Georgian experts expressed the most positive views about cross-border cooperation initiatives in the region, although, similar to the Armenian and Azerbaijani experts, they also recognised the significant barrier posed by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict for such initiatives. Regarding the Georgian-Armenian cooperation, a couple of experts from Armenia noted that their cooperation was minimal largely due to the absence of on-going contacts with colleagues in Georgia.

As for potential areas of collaboration in the wider Caucasus region, experts felt that the development of ecologically friendly tourism was one issue area where all four countries could collaborate. In addition, experts felt that the environmental protection of trans-border waters and cross-border wildlife and nature reserves was an issue area fertile for wider regional cooperation. Experts felt that both political will and donor support were needed for such initiatives to move forward.

“Politics is our obstacle. There are no real ties with Georgia because of this. I know that Russians visit Georgia on holiday, so people to people contact on this simple level does take place. Politics between our countries is such that it is not possible to imagine the development of cooperation on environmental projects in the near future. The only issue area which I see as potentially conducive to Georgian-Russian cooperation is the development of eco-tourism.” [RUSSIA, JOURNALIST]

“I am not aware of cross-border cooperation projects. I am against all the barriers and I wish to see more cross-border cooperation. The tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the tension between Georgia and Russia make region-wide cooperation between environmental stakeholders difficult.” [GEORGIA, JOURNALIST]

“There is not much regional cooperation and yet we need this badly. I can recall only one project on trans-border rivers and the Caspian Sea; we met with experts from neighbouring countries. Such cooperation is driven by specific projects, only when there is a specific project to work on and when there is the donor support. With Armenia it is clear we have a military conflict, but we also have disagreements with Georgia on water security; Kura and Alazani rivers are polluted and Baku gets drinking water from there.” [AZERBAIJAN, SCHOLAR]

“Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan need to sign a cross-border waste management convention, but nothing is done because Armenia and Azerbaijan are in a conflict situation. Georgia, Russia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan have not signed this convention. As a result, nobody is obligated to share any details about any industrial projects that may have hazardous effects on our environment.” **[GEORGIA, JOURNALIST]**

“Cross-border cooperation happens only when the donor community develops such projects and funds them. I remember the study done to assess the environmental quality along the Kura-Araks river basin. This study showed important findings, but no action followed. Georgia and Azerbaijan have not signed an agreement on water cooperation. Georgia pollutes waters greatly and this damages Azerbaijan’s environment.” **[AZERBAIJAN, NGO]**

“I am not able to see region-wide cooperation. It is impossible to work with colleagues from Azerbaijan; we have tried many times before. It makes no sense to talk about cooperation with them when we are in a constant pre-war situation. As for Georgia, our prior attempts to cooperate were fruitless; it is hard to work with Georgians as I have not seen them being focused and actively pursuing cooperation with us.” **[ARMENIA, JOURNALIST]**

“The key problem is the lack of real contacts. I think cooperation between journalists in Georgia and Armenia should be very strong and we need to advance this cooperation.” **[ARMENIA, JOURNALIST]**

3.6. Recommendations

Experts considered that **media's increased attention to, and professionalisation regarding environmental topics are essential for improving public awareness of the importance of protecting one's environment and biodiversity.** Experts asked to see environmental coverage across all media platforms, to include environmental reporting in nationwide media, local newspapers, and popular web portals, emphasising stories that media users could relate to -- linking environmental reporting to citizens' lives. Recognising the wide viewership of leading nationwide television channels across four countries, most experts particularly urged the development of a weekly television program dedicated to environmental news and analysis.

Some experts in Russia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, however, prefaced this suggestion with a caveat: having objective environmental coverage about internal environmental problems on leading nationwide television broadcasts in Armenia, Russia, and Azerbaijan would be difficult, as either the government or business interests influence their content. In contrast, according to the interviewed experts in Georgia, the Georgian media context allowed for more diverse environmental reporting on nationwide media, while recognising that such coverage was largely absent. Experts also recommended the **use of media for the placement of targeted advertising that promotes environmentally friendly behaviour** by citizens and the private sector.

All interviewed experts stressed **the importance of improving the quality of general journalistic standards and environmental specialisation of media professionals** to generate higher quality environmental coverage. Experts welcomed more targeted environmental journalism trainings and workshops for practicing journalists and the introduction of special courses on environmental reporting in journalism departments at local universities. Experts especially encouraged journalists to provide coverage that is analytical in substance, reporting not only on facts, but providing background and analysis of why these facts matter and what consequences may follow.

Interviewed experts were unanimous in highlighting the importance of environmental education to raise environmental consciousness among all the citizens. Along with the media, they felt the primary responsibility for



increasing environmentally savvy citizenry lies in the hands of the education institutions in each country. Experts believed that environmental education should start during the pre-kindergarten period and be offered through high school, educating students about the importance of protecting their environment and being aware of the beauty of local and global natural landscapes and biodiversity. To supplement the role of schools, many experts suggested at least weekly television programs for children on environmental topics. In addition, some experts asked for environmental literature to be available in print and online forms across public libraries.

All experts placed the primary responsibility for improving environmental standards in their countries on their governments, especially all the relevant ministries, including the Ministry of ecology, Ministry of energy, Ministry of economy and development, and Ministry of health, as well as local municipal authorities. Increasing environmental protection mechanisms to include sufficient staffing of environmental inspection structures was deemed important. Further, experts emphasised the importance of enforcing environmental legislation to prevent anti-environmental public and corporate behaviour. While considering governments as having the primary responsibility to protect the environment and biodiversity across the four countries, **the interviewed experts felt cooperation between all environmental stakeholders** including environmental activists, common citizens, media, environmental scholars, and the private sector **is vital** to address the existing environmental concerns and to promote sustainable environmental practices. Many experts felt that such cooperation can be advanced if

important environmental concerns are brought to the public attention through active collaboration between the environmental non-governmental sector and the media. This collaboration would produce environmental reporting that could raise public activism, which in turn could place sufficient pressure on governments and businesses to act in the interest of the environment. In addition, some experts felt that encouraging business to act in a socially responsible manner, and rewarding such behaviour with support for the public image of such businesses, could produce positive results.

Recognising the paucity of cross-border environmental cooperation and the presence of many political barriers for such interactions in the Caucasus region, interviewed experts still felt such cooperation should be advanced to help address the environmental problems that are shared among the countries in this region.

To advance such a cooperation, experts suggested to launch focussed discussions and exchanges of opinion on environmental concerns in individual countries between representatives of the nongovernmental sector, environmental scholars, and media, but noting that these discussions should be initiated by the Ministries of Environment in each country. Experts felt that these discussions will bear results if the media provide focused reporting on these discussions and disseminated information about them among wider audiences. Experts further added that a similar format of discussions should follow on the local level, across different regions, which would allow media, environmental activists, scholars, and local government officials to engage with citizens on the ground around specific issues. Some interviewed experts suggested to establish a Regional Environmental Council that would include all environmental stakeholders from the Caucasus. This Council would allow all interested parties to bring to its attention any set of environmental concerns in the region. The Council's purpose would be to coordinate the efforts aimed at resolving shared environmental concerns. In addition, some interviewed experts suggested holding regular bilateral and multilateral stakeholder visits and joint research and environment conservation projects across the region.

Areas for cross-regional cooperation suggested by the interviewed experts primarily focused on air and water pollution. Specifically, they envisioned cooperation on shared water resources, e.g. cooperation around Kura (Mtkvari)-Araks river, protection of the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. Further, experts felt that region-wide cooperation could also include issues, such as the

development of safe natural resource extraction policies and techniques and the protection of migrating animals, including panthers and mountain goats. Additionally, the protection of cross-border wild-life nature reserves was seen as vital for many interviewed experts, as well for those who felt that the promotion of eco-friendly tourism in such areas could be one way political disputes could be put aside (e.g. between Georgia and Russia) to advance cross-border cooperation in general. Armenian experts suggested that Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey should cooperate and develop an open cross-border international natural park, to include Arpi Lych natural preserve in Armenia, which borders Turkey and Georgia.

Experts welcomed international donor support to promote cross-border environmental cooperation initiatives,

although, several Russian experts felt that the Russian government will be less likely to encourage such programs; these Russian experts specifically mentioned the Russian Treason Law as already creating obstacles for Russian environmental activists seeking to collaborate with their international colleagues. Overall, interviewed experts suggested that donor support should focus on developing the kinds of projects that would reach wider audiences, deepen lasting relationships between environmental stakeholders, positively impact public awareness of environmental issues, and help foster policies and programs to increase environmental protection. Several experts suggested that the international donor community should fund environmental research projects that would facilitate collaboration between environmental scholars and activists and that would be advertised to the public by the media in order to increase public awareness of the programs and citizen activism on environmental protection initiatives.

“Media play the key role in informing Russia's population on developments in our country and they should play a more active role in providing audiences with information about Russia's environment. Media can increase the public interest in protecting our environment. Media can set the “standards” for environmentally friendly lifestyles, work, and production. However, media alone cannot achieve

this. Environmental education and environmental responsibility should be shouldered by our schools, by our universities, and by our government. Government must set a good example.”

[RUSSIA, SCHOLAR]

“If, on a daily basis there was an environment focused program on Channel 1, I think our people would become interested in this issue. Or, if a major internet website focused on the environment that would spark the discussion. Now, we have a vicious cycle: society is not interested, the government is not interested, and media does not have this focus.”

[RUSSIA, NGO]

“We need to work hard and systematically change the situation. This work has to start from early childhood education in our kindergartens, in our schools and universities. Only the generation of adults that is raised with environmental principles can take responsibility for protecting their environment and biodiversity.”

[RUSSIA, JOURNALIST]

“Nationwide television channels should provide regular programs on the environment, targeting older viewers. There should be separate programs targeting children. Media should inform our society, not pacify it. If you look at our broadcast media content now we have entertainment, shows, soap operas, scandals. Many educated people I know stopped watching television for this reason and switched to online media use.”

[AZERBAIJAN, SCHOLAR]

“In order for people to start paying attention to the environment, they need to be told why these issues are important and how they affect them. Unless this knowledge is shared with them and the media in collaboration with environmental activists they cannot make a difference to the level of environmental awareness and activism.”

[GEORGIA, NGO]

“Environmental activists need to constantly inform media about environmental concerns they are working on, providing information about these issues in order for media to produce stories. This would be the most effective way to improve the quality of our environment.”

[AZERBAIJAN, JOURNALIST]

“We need socially conscious advertising telling people why it is important to throw trash into bins. We have lots of ads in all our media, but you never see or hear a socially focused add that tells you how bad it is to burn trash, how damaging certain materials are for our health, etc. Such ads will help our society understand the importance of clean environment.”

[AZERBAIJAN, JOURNALIST]

“Scholarly works on ecology do not reach our population widely. My colleagues and I travelled and examined public libraries in many regions of Azerbaijan and we found that libraries lacked separate sections dedicated to materials on ecology and environment. Access to such materials is essential. Internet should also be accessible in all public libraries. I found one book on ecology published in 1964 in our Baku public library.”

[AZERBAIJAN, SCHOLAR]

“It is clear that we have a military conflict with Armenia, but we also have disagreements with Georgia on water security. To foster cooperation we need to first of all exchange our views, in order to find the agreements and solutions. The exchange of views would be beneficial as a start. If we don't solve existing water pollution problems, that means we do not respect each other. Kura and Alazani rivers are a disaster. We need to gather scholars, NGOs, and media to start the coverage of these processes. We need to show this on TV, not just keep the record of who attended and put it in print. Audio and video files must be available, at least on YouTube, in order for our society to find out what was said on these issues.”

[AZERBAIJAN, SCHOLAR]

“When the government does not declare protection of the environment as a priority, clearly the donor support for this area will also be minimal. This needs to be changed. In Georgia we do not have research institutes that work on the assessment of environmental problems and their effects on public health, at large. There are very few scientists that work on this issue, very few, with minimal resources. In our country there is not a developed system of scientifically gathering data on environment.”

[GEORGIA, NGO]

“Donors need to develop small grant programs. No organisation, especially in the regions, has the luxury of training journalists. Such a program needs to be developed. There are very few conferences and workshops, but the outcome is not what funders expect from media because we still have low quality media reporting on environmental issues. When a journalist who covers culture is sent to attend a press conference on hydro plants, this journalist will not return and be able to develop a quality media report on hydro plants because this journalist does not have the background and education to cover such a story. This kind of environmental education needs to be spread. [GEORGIA, JOURNALIST]

I wish I could have a funder who would buy 15 minutes of airtime on local and regional TV stations, allowing the placement of environmental programs that I would produce and this product would have to have interactive components to have contact with audience on TV, call ins from people, NGOs and local government.

[GEORGIA, JOURNALIST]

4. Country specific Summaries

Armenia

Experts' media use habits and assessment of Armenia's media quality

- The primary sources of information for all interviewed experts were online Armenian and Russian language news portals and social websites. Experts frequently cited Azatutyun, Lragir, and A1+ as sources they turn to for news and information. All interviewed experts were very active information consumers.
- All experts criticised nationwide broadcast media in Armenia for biased political news reporting, which in some cases prompted them to stop their regular usage. Some experts noted that in those instances when specific TV programs are referenced on social media, they look those programs up online, often with the use of Ucom service which allows one to download archived TV programs.
- Armenian experts spoke of highly politicised news content in print media. With the exception of most radio programs with music-centred formats, Armenian media prioritises reports on political themes and entertainment. Most of the content is viewed as superficial, scandalous, and distracting for media consumers. In general, it discourages active civic participation in social and political life in Armenia.
- Several experts felt that many talented and professional journalists in Armenia have a limited sphere and set of opportunities for their work, as most media outlets in the country are directly or indirectly controlled by political actors or business

interests with strong political links. Overall, however, interviewed experts noted that journalists in Armenia needed further professionalisation and access to a better journalistic education.

Assessment of environmental reporting in Armenia

- Experts spoke of the presence of a dynamic, environment-focused media space online. They particularly praised Ecolur and active use of Facebook for exchange of environmental information and mobilisation of citizens to protect Armenia's environment through online groups, such as "SOS Sevan," "We are Protectors of Our Own Town," and "Defenders of Tekhut." Some experts recalled timely environmental reporting on the problem of deforestation in Armenia by hetq.am and armenianow.am in 2007-2008. Some experts also noted www.civilnet.am for environmental reporting in Armenia.
- Environmental reporting on nationwide TV stations is missing or has a propagandistic spin. It often uses a positive tone to cover stories that in reality have a negative environmental impact, framing many stories around job creation and increasing state revenue.

Assessment of quality of Armenia's environment and environmental regulation

- When thinking about the environment in Armenia, most experts' first association was negative. They believe that Armenia's environment and biodiversity is not protected. Experts named a long list of serious environmental problems in Armenia, including

contaminated food, large scale mining abuse of natural resources due to inadequate methods of extraction, endangered forests, unprotected water resources, soil erosion, uncontrolled construction of hydropower plants, pollution in Lake Sevan, construction projects in urban parks and gardens, shortage of green spaces in Yerevan, environmental devastation in the village of Tekhut, and polluted urban spaces, to include Dzermuk, Tsakhkadzor and Yerevan.

- Armenian experts believed that environmental legislation in the country is well developed, however, laws are not enforced. Experts highlighted widespread corruption in the country whereby government officials, individuals and businesses close to the country's political elite can bend the rules to fit their interests.

Assessment of cooperation between media, the non-governmental sector, and environmental scholars in Armenia, and the wider Caucasus region

- Experts acknowledged that citizens of Armenia are not environmental experts, but some degree of environmental awareness does exist among the public. This is largely due to the activism of the non-governmental sector in Armenia and active cooperation between environmental activists and media professionals focused on environmental issues. Experts noted that environmental problems are highlighted first by environmental activists, who in turn mobilise the media. The activists' networks and media together then mobilise the public. Experts noted that only when environmental issues receive media and public attention do politicians pay attention to the concerns.
- Armenian experts evaluated the level of cooperation among environmental stakeholders across the Caucasus region as very poor. There is no cooperation with Azerbaijani experts. Armenian experts wished for more active cooperation with their Georgian counterparts and expressed the hope that Georgian environmental stakeholders would be more responsive and dedicated to the resolution of shared environmental concerns.

Recommendations

- **Advance economic development and education.** Poverty and low levels of education are key obstacles to citizens' awareness of the importance of protecting Armenia's environment and willingness to actively participate in this task. Experts noted that improving Armenia's economic development and quality of education system -- to include information on environment, biodiversity and climate change from early childhood--are essential to advance Armenian citizens' focus on environmental issues.
- **Produce TV programs on the environment.** Experts stressed the importance of producing regular TV programs on environmental topics to increase citizen awareness of the importance of protecting one's environment.
- **Media professionalisation.** Experts highlighted the importance of promoting the independence of media in Armenia and increasing media professionalisation through better journalistic education and training.
- **Strengthen cooperation between environmental stakeholders to increase public awareness of environmental issues in Armenia.** Experts believed that environmental activists and environmental experts should closely cooperate with Armenia's media as Armenia's public officials are more likely to pay due attention to Armenia's environmental problems when media focuses on these issues and mobilises public opinion.
- **Enhance region-wide environmental cooperation. Armenian experts suggested the establishment of a Caucasus-wide Environmental Council** to include all environmental stakeholders from the region. All interested parties would be able to bring to the Council's attention any set of environmental concerns in the region. The Council's purpose should include coordination of efforts aimed at resolving shared environmental concerns. Furthermore, experts suggested holding regular bilateral and multilateral stakeholder visits and joint research and environmental conservation projects across the region.

Azerbaijan

Assessment of Azerbaijan's media quality

- Most experts expressed low trust in Azerbaijan's media due to their dependence on Azerbaijan's government or commercial structures with ties to the government. All experts criticised the quality of television in Azerbaijan, where low cost entertainment content and shows dominate. Experts' media mix is diverse : although, internet usage dominates, it includes Azerbaijani language news portals and social platforms.
- All experts noted a near-absence of educational and analytical programming across all media. Experts were also unanimous in their criticism of the level of professionalism of most journalists in Azerbaijan, which largely reflects on their weak education, lack of professional journalistic training and lack of issue-specific specialisation.

Assessment of quality of Azerbaijan's environment and environmental regulation

- All experts feel that Azerbaijan's environment is not protected. They voiced concerns about high levels of pollution of air, water and soil. Experts recognised that Azerbaijan inherited many environmental problems from past oil and gas production projects and noted that a recent increase in the extraction of Azerbaijan's natural resources has aggravated the problem.
- All experts consider household waste management to be a significant environmental hazard. Furthermore, experts voiced strong public health concerns due to low safety standards of water used for drinking, agriculture and leisure, citing the abysmal environmental conditions of Araks and Kura rivers and the Caspian Sea.
- Experts were divided in their assessment of the quality of the environmental legal framework in Azerbaijan, some saying that it was well-developed but too complex even for legal experts to comprehend, while others stated it was insufficient and needed further refinement. Despite this

disagreement, experts were unanimous in their view that environmental laws and regulations were ineffective, not implemented, and largely blamed widespread corruption in governmental institutions for this.

Assessment of environmental reporting in Azerbaijan

- Experts consider the segment of Azerbaijan's population for whom environmental concerns are among their most pressing priorities to be small. They explain this through low awareness of environmental problems across Azerbaijan and attribute this lack of knowledge to very limited coverage of environmental topics in widely used Azerbaijani media and the absence of environmental education in Azerbaijan's elementary and higher education institutions.
- Most interviewed experts could not recall a single program on nationwide television channels that is dedicated to educating viewers about the environment, biodiversity and the impact of climate change in Azerbaijan. Only short reports depicting environmental calamities appear at times, without any explanation of what causes such floods or droughts and how they could be prevented.
- Experts could not name a single Azerbaijani language daily or weekly newspaper that is solely focused on covering environmental issues. Regular focus on environmental themes is present only in Ekho and Zerkalo publications, both available in Russian.

Assessment of cooperation between media, the non-governmental sector, and environmental scholars in Azerbaijan and the wider Caucasus region

- Experts felt that cooperation between media, scholars and the non-governmental representatives occurs periodically when a donor supported project is being implemented, often resulting in a publication of a brochure with minimal distribution.
- Few experts recalled examples of positive cooperation between media and nongovernmental sector (e.g. reporting on low water levels in one of the lakes located in Shirvan region highlighted

by activism of the NGO sector) or media and environmental scholars (e.g. request for interviews), stressing that such relationships should be more systematic to promote media content on pressing environmental concerns in Azerbaijan.

- Discussion of cross-border cooperation lacked enthusiasm, largely due to the Nagorno- Karakakh conflict, although, many experts noted that the concern for environmental protection should rise above political conflicts. Experts felt that both political will and donor support was needed to address acute pollution levels in trans-border waters. Experts could not name a single ongoing cross-border cooperation project.

Recommendations

- **Pressure the politicians.** While all experts urged Azerbaijan's media to play a more active role in informing and educating Azerbaijan's society about the importance of protecting one's environment, experts unanimously placed primary responsibility for improving environmental standards in Azerbaijan in the hands of Azerbaijan's government, mainly the Ministry of Ecology and all relevant parts of Azerbaijan's executive government, including local government municipal authorities.
- **A professional media is a respected media.** Increasing professionalism of journalists in Azerbaijan is an urgent priority. Short-term training workshops, while helpful, will not be able to substitute the effects of improved quality in the journalism departments at Azerbaijan's universities.
- **Link actions to consequences.** Experts stressed that journalists should provide not only factual reporting about the environment, but analyse the consequences when citizens, corporations and the government neglect the country's environment. Such reporting should become more regular across all media platforms.
- **Education is the key.** Environmental education should begin from early childhood. In this area, the Ministry of Ecology, Ministry of Education, non-governmental sector and environmental scholars must cooperate. Media must also play an important role by producing at least weekly television programs for children on environmental topics that are both attractive to watch while being educationally enriching in content.
- **Improve access to information.** Some experts suggested that literature on the environment, biodiversity, climate change, flora and fauna become available in public libraries across Azerbaijan. Further, experts noted that every public library should have computers with online access to websites providing users with information on environmental issues.
- **Effective law enforcement.** Experts also hoped that the law-enforcement of environmental violations in Azerbaijan will become more effective and that broadcast media would bring such stories to the attention of wider audiences to improve environmental consciousness among Azerbaijan's population at large.
- **Cross border cooperation lead by policy makers.** Experts recommended that the advancement of cross-border environmental cooperation should start from the discussion and exchange of opinions on environmental concerns in the region. Experts felt such discussions should be initiated by relevant ministries and must include non-governmental sector, environmental experts and media. Media must report in detail about these discussions, providing analysis, not just official protocol of who attended and what general issues were discussed. These discussions should transition into public spaces across different regions through the continued cooperation among media, non-governmental sector, local governments and common citizens.
- **Target donor support on the projects with greater impact.** Experts suggested that the donor support should focus on developing the kinds of projects that would reach wider audiences and deepen lasting relationships between environmental stakeholders. One expert suggested that donors should fund environmental research projects that would facilitate the collaboration between environmental scholars and activists and would be brought to the public attention by the media.

Georgia

Assessment of quality of Georgia's environment

- All experts strongly felt that Georgia's environment and biodiversity is not adequately protected. Experts cite an absence of modern waste management and processing facilities in the country as a key environmental problem, which some believe reflects not only on the country's economic underdevelopment but also on the fact that environmental protection is not a priority for the government of Georgia. Experts were unanimous in their criticism of the quality and effectiveness of Georgia's environmental legal framework, finding it insufficient, needing development, refinement, and enforcement.
- Most commonly cited environmental concerns included the lack of household and industrial waste management system, water pollution (e.g. Black Sea), and air pollution (e.g. increased transport; absence of emission standards; usage of low quality fuel).
- Another concern voiced by several experts was the absence of a proper waste management system across Georgia's hospitals and clinics, placing highly hazardous waste in common public bins located outside of medical clinics, frequented by dogs and cats, posing a serious sanitary threat to Georgian society.
- Experts also criticised low standards of industrial production in the country and absence of environmental safeguards having negative effects on air, water and soil quality in Georgia.
- Illegal logging or government-sanctioned logging was considered highly damaging to Georgia's environment and biodiversity. Experts believe this logging is causing mud slides in Georgia. Illegal hunting and fishing were also named as significant problems in Georgia, hurting Georgia's biodiversity. Some experts said the hunters lacked awareness about Georgia's endangered species and that this was a factor which hurts preservation of Georgia's natural habitat and biodiversity.
- Experts appreciated the need for Georgia to attract foreign investment to advance the country's development, although, feared that often such investment is drawn to Georgia because of its weak

environmental regulation and standards. Every expert spoke about Georgia's hydropower potential, however, they expressed significant concern that not enough attention is paid to independent assessments of potential costs and benefits associated with such development initiatives.

- Every expert expressed grave concern about pollution in the Mtkvari river, which flows from Turkey through Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan (providing irrigation and drinking water for Azerbaijan). Experts noted that the river is polluted along the way, specifically mentioning Georgia's need to stop dumping raw sewage into it. The latter would require large scale investment in human waste management systems across the country, which are either not developed at all in many parts of the country or are outdated and broken down.
- Some spoke of Georgia's outdated water filtration infrastructure in urban locations and the lack of access to drinking water in rural parts of Georgia, both posing a health hazard to local populations.

Assessment of environmental reporting in Georgia

- Experts found Georgian broadcast media, which is most widely used by the Georgian population, to be full of political reporting and entertainment content, but having practically no coverage of environmental issues. Environmental stories occasionally appear in Georgian newspapers (e.g. Rezonansi and Batumelebi). Environment coverage is more regularly seen in online publications, such as Liberali, Netgazeti and Guria news.
- Experts noted access to the internet is still low in Georgia, however, among internet users, popularity of social websites, such as Facebook, is increasing. They recalled examples of public protests with specific environmental concerns being galvanised through social media.
- While newspapers occasionally provide reporting on environmental topics, experts felt such reports often lacked adequate development and follow through, producing fragmented coverage and no effect on public opinion.

Assessment of cooperation between media, the non-governmental sector, and

environmental scholars in Georgia and the wider Caucasus region

- Most experts felt that the current level of cooperation between media, scholars and the non-governmental sector was weak. Some cooperation occurs and is donor driven, but remains small in scale, and has not achieved impact. One exception cited nearly by all interviewed experts was the role played by the Green Alternative NGO and some regional environmental groups who provide interested media professionals with information and training opportunities, including access to environmental expert opinions, and help improve quality of environmental reporting.
- Georgian experts welcomed cross-border environmental cooperation and said not enough was done to promote such initiatives. While recognising the presence of political obstacles in advancing cooperation between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Armenia and Turkey, Georgian experts stressed the commonality of environment problems in the region and the benefits cooperation on environmental issues could produce.

Recommendations

- **Media can play an important role.** All experts believed Georgia's media has the ability to improve environmental awareness among the Georgian population and increase responsible governance of country's environment and biodiversity. Experts hoped for increased professionalism of Georgian journalists to produce informed factual and analytical materials on pressing environmental issues. Such reporting should become more regular across all media platforms. Some experts suggested that the Georgian public broadcaster should have a weekly prime time program with a discussion/debate format, with a real focus and exchange of views on a topical environmental issue.
- **Education is the key.** In addition to media, experts believed it is the responsibility of the Georgian Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Environment to promote the development of an environmentally savvy citizenry. They suggested the two ministries should cooperate in the development of environmental education modules appropriate for early childhood, elementary and higher education levels. Many experts stressed that development of environmentally conscious citizenship must start from a young age. Media's contribution could be through regular television programs for children on environmental topics that are both attractive to watch and educationally enriching in content.
- **Increase targeted donor assistance.** Experts asked for better targeting of donor assistance. For example, some experts stressed the need to prioritise development of the professional bureaucracy in Georgia who are responsible for environmental protection. To illustrate how ineffective donor assistance could be some experts referred to over 3 million Euros being spent on foreign expert advice on waste management legislation over the past 15 years, which still has not produced an effective waste management law.
- **Stakeholder engagement.** All experts believed that to improve environmental protection in Georgia cooperation among all relevant stakeholders is essential. In the words of one media expert, "Georgia's Ministry of Environment with one Minister and a staff of 200 cannot solve all of Georgia's environmental problems. The effort must include all stakeholders, starting from our citizens." Furthermore, many interviewed experts stressed the need to reinstate the inspection authorities of the Ministry of Environment which were removed from its jurisdiction in 2011 and placed within the Ministry of Energy.
- **Link environmental news to public health concerns.** Experts also noted that Georgian citizens have the right to know what quality air they are breathing. Such information should be gathered daily by relevant authorities and made available daily through Georgian media. Furthermore, experts noted that health statistics published by the Ministry of Health should contain region-specific data so that the Georgian population can have access to more detailed information. This information should be linked with data on the environmental problems in specific regions, thus increasing environmental awareness among Georgia's population.
- **Increasing journalists' understanding of environmental issues** through donor grants and training support to Georgian media outlets would enable media editors to have dedicated environmental journalists. This in turn would produce improved environmental reporting by Georgian media and increased audience demand for such coverage.

Russia

Assessment of environmental reporting in Russian media

- Experts all commented that nationwide Russian media pay little attention to environmental issues. They described Russian national media as being dependent on the government or business owners, leaving little space for independent journalism. Regional media, including local editions of nationwide print publications, occasionally provide environmental reporting, although, experts believed the analytic quality of environmental stories could be significantly improved. Overall, experts felt there was a significant absence of highly skilled environmental journalism in national media in Russia.
- Unlike nationwide media, experts believe the internet has a rich selection of information on environmental issues available through diverse internet blogs, social journals, Russian environmental non-governmental sector websites, and online newspaper publications. Still, the lack of environmental reporting in nationwide media was seen as a significant obstacle for improving public awareness of environmental issues.

Key environmental concerns and assessment of environmental regulation

- The interviewed experts believe the environment in Sochi, North Caucasus, and across other parts of the Russian Federation is under threat. Interviewed environmental scholars and activists felt it was in a “pre-crisis situation” as Russia’s economic development has been largely “anti-environmental,” with only minor improvements in the Russian government’s stated environmental policies.
- However, experts felt that these improvements, e.g. adoption of the Russian Federation Environmental Policy through 2030, signed by the President of Russia in April 2012, came about as a result of public pressure on Russian authorities to address Russia’s grave environmental concerns.
- Key environmental concerns in Russia include urban air pollution, absence of effective solid and industrial waste management and processing facilities, aging

industrial infrastructure, uncontrolled urbanisation and industrialisation, and unregulated mining and extractive industries. These trends, experts believed, threaten Russia’s environment and biodiversity. Experts believed that environmental problems across Sochi and the North Caucasus region were representative of Russia’s overall environmental condition.

- Experts believed that global warming has negatively impacted Russia’s environment. Specifically, they attribute an increase in forest fires, melting of snow glaciers, and changes agricultural growing seasons to climate change. The melting of glaciers has become a serious problem in the North Caucasus and has resulted in lower supplies of water. Experts also feared that global warming will have a negative impact on winter sporting facilities across the Caucasus.
- Experts criticised environmental legislation in Russia as overly bias in favour of corporate interests versus environmental preservation. For example, experts criticised the Forest Code of the Russian Federation, adopted in 2006, which mentions important environmental concepts but is abstract and not enforced; instead it is perceived that it has helped stimulate increased commercial activities in the forestry sector. In addition, experts deemed the placement of environmental protection functions within the Ministry of Natural Resources as not a progressive step by the Federal Government of the Russian Federation, as they felt this organisation was primarily focused on commercial uses of natural resource and that the goals of promoting natural resource use and of protecting Russia’s environment conflict.
- Environmental activists warned against changes in the legal classification of federal lands, which allow for production activities in previously protected territories. For example, experts cited reclassification of federal lands in Sochi to permit development of Sochi Winter Olympics facilities in areas previously classified as federal nature reserves.

Public awareness of environmental concerns

- Experts rated general public awareness of environmental issues as low. Experts observed that public activism rises only when environmental problems impact them directly, e.g. when rubbish starts to be dumped nearby, or when construction of a hazardous industrial facility is launched. Russian experts said that one recent positive change they have noticed is the engagement of Russian youth in environmental protection issues and activities.
- Experts believed that knowledge of environmental legislation and regulation is weak, even among the expert community, and they were confident that common citizens had practically no understanding of environmental legal statutes. Experts stressed that greater public awareness of environmental laws would help Russian citizens be more capable in protecting their rights and the environment and biodiversity in Russia.

Environmental stakeholders

- Experts felt environmental activists are the most ardent defenders of Russia's environment. They emphasised the presence of an active environmental non-governmental sector in Sochi. They noted, however, that similar groups were less numerous across other North Caucasus republics.
- Experts complimented the work of the North Caucasus Environmental Watch in raising public awareness of environmental problems across this region. Interviewed journalists said they receive weekly environmental news updates from environmental groups.
- Experts believed the Russian media has the power to increase environmental awareness and activism of Russian citizens by having more regular reports on relevant environmental issues for Russian viewers; serving as a forum that connects environmental activists and the wider public; utilising diverse expert opinions in coverage of environmental issues; and bringing public concerns about Russia's environment to the attention of Russian government and the private sector.
- Experts emphasised that Russia's government must create and implement policies that protect Russia's environment and biodiversity and regretted that thus far Russian authorities are failing in this task. Experts believed the Federal Government should provide the necessary funds to implement environmentally sound programmes across the country.

Recommendations

- **Raise public awareness about the importance of the environment.** Experts believed this can be achieved through environmental education in schools and advertising campaigns to encourage awareness of environmental issues and environmentally friendly citizen behaviour.
- **Improve public awareness of environmental legislation.** Experts felt that by improving public awareness of environmental laws, Russian citizens would be better able to monitor and hold accountable the activities of Russia's government and businesses in order to minimise environmental damage.
- **Develop regular media programs on environmental topics.** Nearly all experts suggested that a weekly television program dedicated to environmental issues on a nationwide Russian television channel would improve Russian citizens' awareness of the importance of protecting the environment and biodiversity. More regular environmental coverage in online and print media was also encouraged. Some experts noted that if environmental stories appeared among top news stories during online searches on yandex.ru or other Russian portals, more users would receive this content. Several experts noted that without a more independent media environment in Russia it would be difficult to imagine objective environmental coverage in the federal media.
- **Develop journalists with environmental specialisation.** All experts felt that professional journalists with a dedicated environmental beat were rare in Russia and that such professionalisation was essential to improve the quality of journalism on environmental issues in Russia.
- **Foster cooperation between environmental stakeholders in Russia.** Some experts suggested that such cooperation can be fostered through organising public hearings around specific environmental issues. Experts felt that by organising such public hearings with the participation of environmental activists, environmental scholars, media, public officials, businesses and citizens there would be more opportunities to foster cooperation among environmental stakeholders.
- **Build on citizen activism around local environmental concerns to expand citizen participation in country-wide environmental campaigns.** Several environmental activists and journalists noted that such cooperation can be promoted if local media outlets covered environmental problems taking place outside of their immediate region.

Appendix A: In-Depth Interview Questionnaire

SECTION 1

Objective: To understand experts' media use patterns and their views on the quality of media available to them.

- How important is it for you to stay informed about current events in your country? Your region? World?
- Thinking about all the media sources and media platforms available for your consumption, where do you turn first for news and information?
- How would you describe your news consumption behaviour on a typical day? Is your news behaviour representative of media consumption habits by your peers? How are your friends and family similar or different from you in terms of media consumption?
- If you were to think about different content available in local media, how would you break it down in terms of topics? What type of news dominates? What would you say falls in second place? Third?
- Do you notice any shifts in the balance between news and information vs. entertainment in [country] media? Is the balance tipping in favour of one area more than the other?
- If you were to think about your level of trust in [country] media, how would you describe your thoughts? How do you assess the trustworthiness of the news stories you receive?
- How do you assess the level of professionalism of [country] journalists?
- If given a choice between turning to friends and family for news and information vs. media outlets, where would you turn first?
- What changes would you like to see in the media environment in your country in the near term and in the long term?

SECTION 2

Objective: To understand the quantity and quality of environmental journalism in respective countries and to identify the most pressing environmental concerns and key stakeholders.

- Is your country's environment adequately protected or not? Why do you think so?
- What would you say are the most pressing environmental problems/concerns in our country?
- *[Used only in Russia]* Now, thinking specifically about Sochi, what environmental issues come to mind? What can you tell us about the environment/ecology/biodiversity in Sochi and what, if any, concerns do you have about Sochi's environment and ecology?
- *[Used only in Russia]* Now, thinking about the environment and ecology in the North Caucasus region, what can you tell us about the quality of environment there? What would you say are the most pressing environmental problems/concerns in the North Caucasus, if any?
- In your opinion are citizens in your country aware of these environmental problems or not? How well do you think they understand them and how much priority do you think they assign to addressing these problems?
- How aware is the [country] public about the linkages between climate change and biodiversity?
- In your opinion whose actions or inaction poses danger to the quality of your country's environment? Why do you think so?

- In your opinion, who are the stakeholders in protecting environment in your country? [*Probe for:* local government, national government, citizens, NGO activists, scientists, international community, corporations, media, etc.]
- What role does [country] media play in protecting [country] environment?
- [*Used only in Russia*] Do Russian media work under specific security concerns when reporting on environmental issues? If so, what are they?
- How frequently do you encounter media reports on environmental issues? [*For use in Russia only:* How frequently do you encounter media reports on environmental issues in general and/or environmental conditions in Sochi and North Caucasus specifically? Would you say you come across media reports on environmental issues on a daily basis, once a week, once a month or less frequently?]
- Which media provide content on environmental issues? [*For use in Russia only:* How about coverage of environmental issues in Sochi and North Caucasus?]
- Can you think of specific examples of environmental reporting in [country] media? What issues were highlighted in those stories? [*For use in Russia:* Can you share some specific examples that come to mind on environmental reporting on Sochi and on North Caucasus in Russian media? What issues were highlighted in those stories?]
- Can you name any journalists who on a regular basis cover environmental issues? [*In Russia use:* Can you name any journalists who cover environmental issues in Sochi and North Caucasus?]
- How would you evaluate the quality of environmental reporting in [country] media? [*Probe for:* informational value, analytical depth, journalistic professionalism]
- Does [country] media serve as a platform for public discourse and learning about environmental issues, or do you think [country] media does not yet play this role? Why do you think so?
- Is [country] media influential or not in changing public opinion on environmental concerns? Can you think of specific examples where media impacted public opinion on an environmental issue?
- What are the important environmental stories that are missed and in your opinion should be covered by [country] media?
- What are the key challenges of producing quality environmental reporting in your country? How do you

think these obstacles could be overcome? Is there any local demand for environmental news reporting in your country or not? What causes this?

- If you were to consider the relationship between the journalists, media editors, media owners, political actors and citizens, who do you think is setting the agenda for environmental reporting? How are environmental stories developed? Who drives the demand?
- What do you think are the most effective ways for media in our country to increase awareness about climate change, biodiversity protection, ecosystems management in your country? What specific recommendations/suggestions can you offer?

SECTION 3

Objective: To assess the quality of environmental laws and regulation.

- Thinking specifically about your country's environment, ecosystems management, how would you describe existing laws and government regulations and ecosystems management practices?
- Which laws come to mind when you think about our country's environmental protection? Are these laws adequate, broad enough, and effective?
- In your opinion, are citizens in your country aware of these environmental laws and regulations?
- Are these laws and regulations lived out in practice?
- Can you think of specific examples that illustrate most common ways citizens ignore existing environmental laws and regulations?
- If you were tasked to think of ways to bring about a positive change in citizen behaviour, how would you go about it? What actions would you take?

SECTION 4

Objective: To identify ways to increase cooperation between media professionals, environmental activists and scientists/scholars and identify effective ways to raise visibility and generate debate about the environment, biodiversity protection and ecosystems management in your country and the Caucasus region in general [note: in Russia this objective tailored to Sochi and North Caucasus].

- If you were to think about the level of cooperation and the degree of interconnectedness among media professionals, environmental activists and environmental scientists, how would you describe their relationships in your country?
- Can you think of specific examples/scenarios that help us understand the nature of relationships

between these groups (media, environmental activists, and environmental scientists)? How do they interact or when do you anticipate their interactions to take place? Are the relationships cooperative, neutral or confrontational in nature?

- How can more cooperative interactions/relationships be developed? What specific suggestions can you offer to achieve a greater degree of cooperation among these communities?
- How would you describe the level of cross-border regional cooperation in the area of environmental protection in the Caucasus region among these communities? What key drivers of cooperation do you see and how would you describe the obstacles?
- Would you like for the barriers for cross-border cooperation to be minimised? If so, how best to achieve this?
- If you were to identify three key areas for cross-border environmental cooperation, what would you include in your list and how would you start and advance cooperation?
- In your opinion, what concrete steps should be pursued to raise visibility and generate debate about environment, biodiversity protection and ecosystems management in your country? How about in the Caucasus region in general?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN OUR STUDY!

Appendix B: Participant Demographics

ARMENIA

PROFESSION	GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION
Journalist	Female	61	Higher
Journalist	Male	54	Higher
Journalist	Male	31	Higher
NGO	Male	34	Higher
NGO	Male	29	Higher
NGO	Male	27	Higher
Scholar	Male	73	Higher
Scholar	Female	52	Higher
Scholar	Female	53	Higher

AZERBAIJAN

PROFESSION	GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION
Journalist	Female	40	Higher
Journalist	Female	39	Higher
Journalist	Female	32	Higher
NGO	Male	50	Higher
NGO	Female	52	Higher
NGO	Male	41	Higher
Scholar	Male	70	Higher
Scholar	Male	54	Higher
Scholar	Male	65	Higher

GEORGIA

PROFESSION	GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION
Journalist	Female	27	Higher
Journalist	Female	28	Higher
Journalist	Male	36	Higher
NGO	Female	41	Higher
NGO	Female	57	Higher
NGO	Female	39	Higher
Scholar	Male	58	Higher
Scholar	Male	51	Higher
Scholar	Female	65	Higher

RUSSIA

PROFESSION	GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION
Journalist	Female	35	Higher
Journalist	Male	28	Higher
Journalist	Female	27	Higher
NGO	Male	43	Higher
NGO	Male	54	Higher
NGO	Female	41	Higher
Scholar	Male	62	Higher
Scholar	Male	61	Higher
Scholar	Male	58	Higher

About Internews Europe

INTERNEWS EUROPE is an international development organisation specialising in supporting independent media, freedom of information and free expression around the globe. The vast majority of our programmes are targeted at crisis-hit populations, emerging democracies and some of the world's poorest countries.



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