

Introduction to the New Central Asian Sustainable Use & Livelihoods Specialist Group



The IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group (SULi) is a global expert network formed by IUCN as a joint initiative of the Species Survival Commission (SSC) and the Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP).

In September 2018 a regional subgroup of SULi was established for the wider Central Asian Region, including China, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Russia. The goal of this specialist group is strengthening and improving conservation through sustainable use of wild resources such as wildlife, fish, wild plants, wild fruits, fungus, pastures and forest. One of the highest priorities for Central Asian SULi SG (SULiCA) will be development of better wildlife management that supports community-based, bottom up management in the selected region.

Central Asia with its wild resources, particularly wildlife, and unique game species such as wild sheep and wild goats, is a very attractive region for humans. Fast growing local communities and with this, a growing livestock industry is putting this enigmatic wildlife under big pressure.

by Khalil Karimov, MSc

Unsustainable practices of communal hunting, but also unsustainable hunting tourism industry are additional pressures. Lack of scientific knowledge on populations' status of the different species, and future trends is another significant gap for sustainable management. Last, but not least, elite capture of concession areas and overseas markets, as well as inadequate re-investment of benefits from hunting into conservation and a lack of apparent benefits for communities as the local wildlife stewards are creating an uncertain future for some regions and the wild resources therein.

Over 45 national and international experts assembled at a SULi roundtable in Kyrgyzstan in September 2018. This round table served for setting up this SG and clarifying the current situation and priorities for action. One of the key organizers of this roundtable was the Hunting and Conservation Alliance of Tajikistan (H&CAT); their representatives confirmed that they will continue to support the establishment of this SG contributing practical knowledge from experience gained over the past years.

In the next years SULi Central Asia will focus on mobilizing national and international experts to establish a science-based platform for sustainable wildlife management and community based natural resource management in the region. The group will assist policy- and decisions-makers to improve sustainable management and secure livelihoods for key stakeholders, particularly local communities. The global SULi SG will collaborate closely with SULi CA.

I was appointed Chair of SULi Central Asia - this is a unique lifetime opportunity and challenge to work towards habitat and wildlife conservation and management in this region, to help local communities to assert customary and legal rights to the land they live on, and the conservation and sustainable use of their wild resources for the benefit of future generations. I am very excited and optimistic about this development. My background and expertise, as well as the colleagues from my regional and international networks will assist choosing the optimum path to build this group. I have worked for Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH or GIZ in short, a German development agency headquartered in Bonn and Eschborn, and U.S. based Panthera, the only organization in the world that is devoted exclusively to the conservation of the world's 40 wild cat species and their landscapes. To this day I collaborate with both organizations in regional projects. I am a member of several IUCN specialist groups - Cats, Bears, Caprinae and SULi. I am a Head of the Tajik Delegation of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC) and closely collaborate with the hunting-conservation world on development of best practices for sustainable use of wild game resources. Some years ago, I founded and established the Hunting and Conservation Alliance of Tajikistan, but am no longer directly involved in this alliance, because I must remain independent. My present involvement with H&CAT largely on an advisory basis, including promotion, high-level communication and essential support for H&CAT at early stages of this completely new and not yet finally developed community wildlife management approach in this region.

I will put all my efforts to establish a strong and influential IUCN SULi CA SG, which will be advocating for sustainable conservation and community-based conservation. I am working currently on creating a supporting foundation to be able to get donations but also apply for big grants in order to develop and run this group. During the coming years, 2019 and 2020, I will be visiting the countries of the region, dialoguing with local stakeholders to understand their points of view and the work they do. I will approach the most promising young conservationists from the region and motivate them to join our

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specialist group. I am looking forward to work with many experts from various sectors and countries: this will be a busy time, but I am very glad to do this work. Together with local experts, we will first of all try to focus much on all gaps, such as scientific data and will try to fill all these gaps, and make this data available on official IUCN SULiCA Web-Page.

Conservation of wildlife, sustainable use and local communities from rural parts of the world is my life passion. In October 2018 I have participated at the opening ceremony of the 2018 Illegal Wildlife Trade Conference in London which was officially opened by the royal brothers at St James' Palace. The personal dialog I had with Prince Harry, who has an excellent understanding of the role of community conservation and the need for benefits and incentives, including through sustainable use, has inspired me to work even harder for sustainable conservation. I cordially thank all my networks, private sponsors and common thinkers who support me in my pioneering mission.