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NEAR EAST FORESTRY AND RANGE COMMISSION

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STATE OF FORESTS IN THE NEAR EAST

I. INTRODUCING FRA 2015

1. The Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA)¹, coordinated by FAO, has been published at approximately five to ten year intervals since FAO was established in 1945². The scope and content of the global assessments have evolved over time to respond to changing information needs that range from studies of timber supply trends to forest area change and rates of deforestation.

2. FRA 2015 contains an analysis of 234 countries and territories' reports, including 155 presenting government forest statistics in a common format. The results in FRA 2015 are a product of greater coordination between countries and other international organizations. In 2011, six international organizations and processes³ came together to create the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ). The CFRQ was built to ease the reporting burden on countries; thus the data is collected once but used for reporting to multiple agencies and international organizations.

3. Over the last 25 years, forest management has resulted in benefits for the world's forests. Even though, globally, the extent of the world's forest continues to decline as the human population continues to grow and demand for food and land increases, the rate of net forest loss has been cut by over 50 percent during this time. At the same time, substantial progress has been made towards sustainable forest management (SFM) as 98 percent of global permanent forest area is covered by policies or regulations that support SFM. Forest resource data are being generated now at a greater

¹ FAO, 2015, Global Forest Resources Assessment 2015, How are the world's forests changing?

² The reporting years have been as follows: 1946-1948, 1953, 1958, 1963, mid-1970s (Regional assessments), 1980, 1988, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010.

³ Central African Forest Commission/Observatoire des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale (COMIFAC/OFAC), FAO, FOREST EUROPE, International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), Montréal Process, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

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frequency than at any other time in history. Countries have more knowledge of their forest resources than ever before and as a result there is a better picture of the state of global forest resources.

4. The FRA 2015 data, analysis and results, which are the basis of much of the information presented in this paper, are documented in a series of technical reports, scientific articles and on-line access as follows:

- The synthesis report “How are the World’s Forests Changing?” summarizes some of the key findings about the status and trends of the world’s forest, as well as an outlook for the future. The synthesis report is available for download at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4793e.pdf>
- Summary tables for all variables collected in FRA 2015 are presented in the FRA 2015 Desk Reference which can be found at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4808e.pdf>
- A more detailed set of analyses are presented in independently peer-reviewed papers in the journal Forest Ecology and Management at <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4895e/index.html4>.

II. STATUS OF THE NEAR EAST FORESTS

A. General Overview

5. For the purpose of FAO, the Near East and North Africa (NENA) Region includes 19 countries including Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. See Figure 1 below.

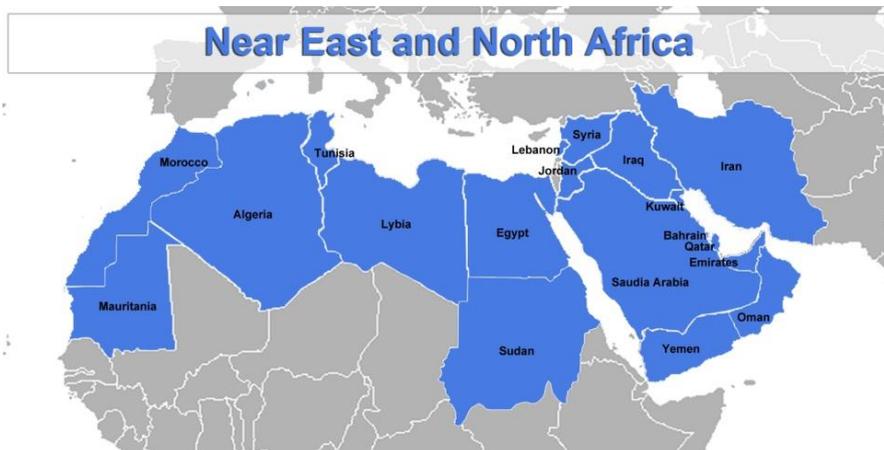


Figure 1: FAO RNE member countries (FAO/ RNE Cairo)

6. According to the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations⁴, the total population of the countries comprising the Near East and North Africa (NENA) Region in 2015 is estimated to be 447 million persons. The Region is characterized by a low population density (14 people per square kilometer as compared to the world average of 52) and uneven distribution of rural population among the countries.

⁴ UN, 2012, Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, <http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/index.htm>

7. The population size varies remarkably between the countries of the NENA with the highest amount in Egypt (84.7 million) followed by Iran (79.4 million). During the twentieth century, the population of some Near East countries has more than quadrupled in countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iran. The extent of the rural population is the lowest in the Gulf countries and highest in Sudan (65 percent), Yemen (64.5 percent) and Mauritania (56 percent).⁵ The more forested countries in the region e.g. Sudan, Iran, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia have relatively high rural populations, which depend largely on forest ecosystems for their livelihoods.

B. State and change of forests

Forest area and area change

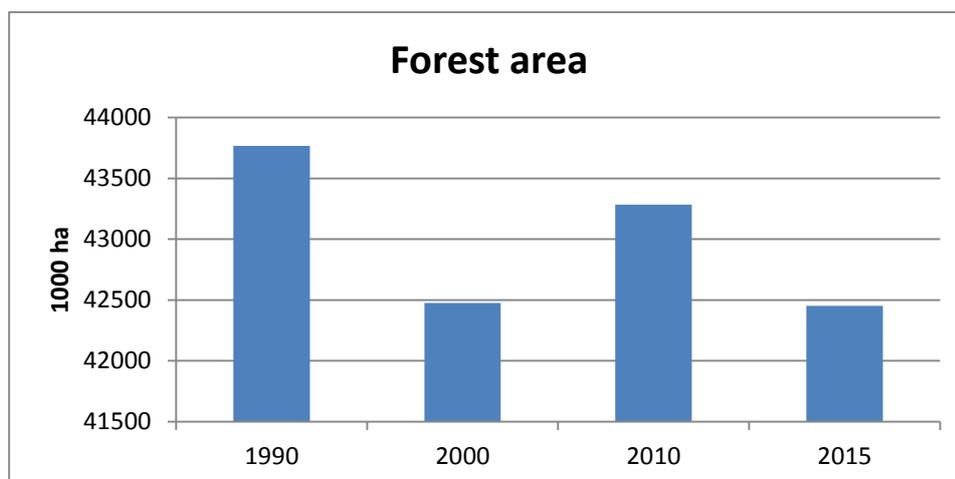
8. The NENA Region, as reported in the FRA 2015, contains a total area of forest cover of 42 million hectares. More than 95 percent of the forest cover is shared between 9 countries namely Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen. This leaves less than 5 percent to the other 10 countries. The total forest area of the NENA Region covers 42.54 million hectares, with the Sudan containing the bulk of the region's forest, followed by Iran. (Table 1 below). With the exception of two countries, trends in the rest of the NENA countries show a consistent positive increase in the extent of forest area over the 25 year period. However, due to forest losses mostly in Sudan, an overall decrease of 830 thousand hectares in the region occurred over the last five years. (Figure 2 below).

Table 1: Total Forest Area in the NENA region, by country (000 ha)

	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015
Morocco	4954	4993	5401	5672	5632
UAE	245	310	312	317.3	322.6
Bahrain	0.216	0.371	0.448	0.526	0.604
Algeria	1667	1579	1536	1918	1956
Egypt	44	59	67	70	73
Iran	9076.058	9325.656	10691.98	10691.98	10691.98
Iraq	804	818	825	825	825
Jordan	97.5	97.5	97.5	97.5	97.5
Kuwait	3.45	4.85	5.55	6.25	6.25
Lebanon	131	131	136.5	136.9	137.3
Libya	217	217	217	217	217
Mauritania	415	317	267	242	224.5
Oman	2	2	2	2	2
Qatar	0	0	0	0	0
Saudi Arabia	977	977	977	977	977
Sudan	23570.313	21826.163	20954.088	20082.012	19209.938
Syria	372	432	461	491	491
Tunisia	643	837	915	990	1041
Yemen	549	549	549	549	549
Grand Total	43767.537	42475.54	43415.066	43285.468	42453.672

⁵ Source : <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL>

Figure 2: Total forest area by year (000 ha)



C. Forest types and functions

Forest types in the NENA region

9. Natural forests covered the largest area of the NENA region, reaching 72.2 percent by 2015. (Figure 3 below). However, both primary and natural forests had decreased steadily since 1990, with planted forests increasing slightly over the same time. Primary forest cover, despite their resilience to the climatic hazards, prolonged aridity and climate change, has diminished 13.8 percent over the last 25 years. The loss of natural forest is much greater than the gain through afforestation. (Table 2 below)

Figure 3: Types of Forest in the NENA region (%)

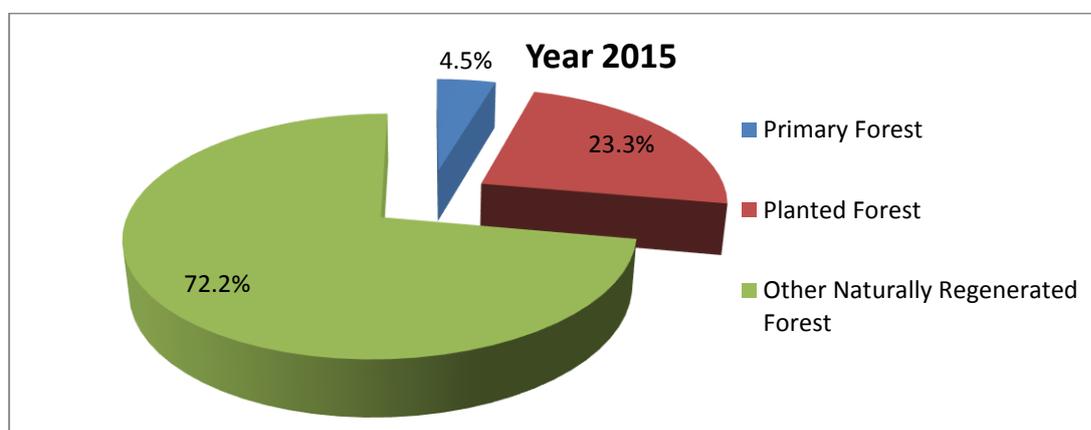


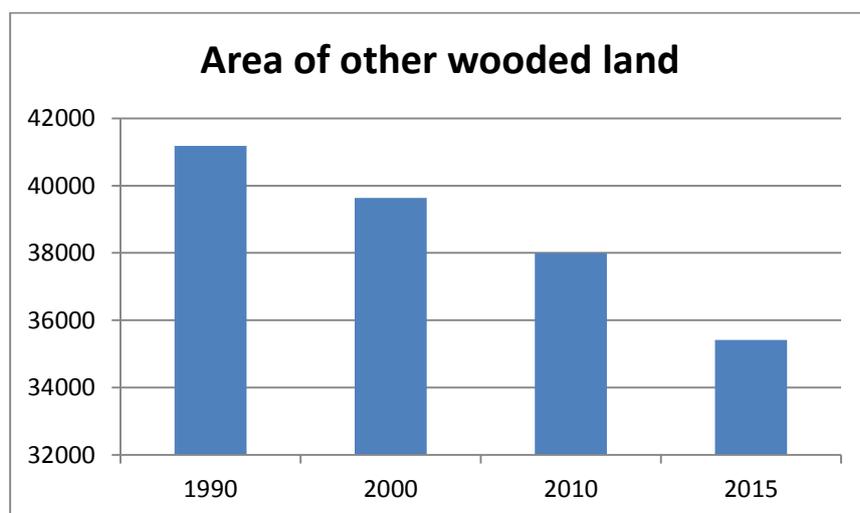
Table 2: trends of natural and planted forest areas from 1990 to 2015

	Primary Forest	Planted Forest	Other Naturally Regenerated Forest
1990	2209.922	7575.342	33381.773
2000	2087.831	8162.897	31564.312
2010	1965.741	9329.346	31264.981
2015	1904.696	9712.736	30110.44

Other Wooded Land area and area change

10. As part of the natural forest ecosystems, the Other Wooded Land (OWL) is somewhat comparable in size to the region's forest area. Based on data from FRA 2015, from 1990 to 2015, OWL has decreased from 41 million hectares to 35 million hectares. The conversion of the OWL to other land uses was accelerated during the period of 2010 to 2015, resulting in a yearly loss of 1.4 percent. Figure 4 shows the negative trend and possible trajectories of the OWL area which may be result of a faster destruction of resources but could slow if countries take appropriate measures to protect these resources.

Figure 4: Estimated OWL area in NENA Region for each FRA since 1990



D. Functions of NENA forests

Designations of NENA forests and Non-wood forest products (WFPs)

11. The main designated functions of the Near East and North African forests are protection of soil and water, conservation of biodiversity and production. More than 13 million hectares of forest are managed primarily for the production of wood and non-wood forest products. In NENA countries, however, where the climate is predominantly arid, the production of timber and other industrial products is negligible. Industrial roundwood removals is scarce in most countries.

12. The NENA forest ecosystems make a greater contribution to the provision of various other wood and NWFPs and services. The array of NWFPs and services is wide and makes forests one of the pillars of the national strategies for poverty alleviation, socio-economic development, food security and preservation of the multiple environmental services considered today by the international community of global importance (biodiversity, landscape quality, preservation of water resources and fight against land degradation). Major NWFPs in the NENA Region of recorded economic values in national statistics include, but not exclusive to, gum arabic (Sudan), frankincense (Yemen & Sudan), pistachio & walnut (Iran), argan oil (Morocco), cork (Mehreb countries), rosemary (Tunisia), carob, (Algeria), stone pine nut (Lebanon & Tunisia), honey (Yemen, Egypt, Morocco, Jordan & others) and medicinal plants (Egypt and others)⁶.

⁶ FAO, 2001, NWFPs in the Near East.

13. Foods from forests and trees outside forests constitute an important component of household food supply. They include a wide range of NWFPs and animal products found in markets in both rural and urban areas. In some cases, NWFPs also contribute to national economies. In countries like Sudan, Yemen, Tunisia, Iran and Lebanon the revenues from the exports of NWFPs are quite significant, exceeding by far those from wood products exports⁷. At the regional level, the forest sector alone contributes more than US\$11 billion to the gross domestic product of the countries⁸. This remains part of the real contribution, since large quantities of NWFPs used by the local populations for their daily subsistence are not accounted for in the national statistics.

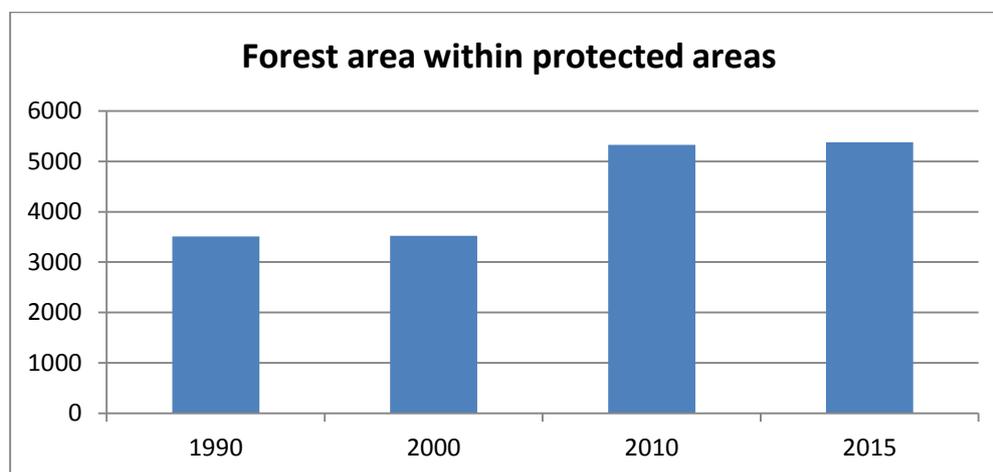
14. The majority of the growing stock historically has been used for fuel in the region. As of 2014, nearly 87 million people still use fuelwood to cook, corresponding to 19.4 percent of the region's population. Woodfuel provided, in the same year, 17 Mega Tonne of Oil Equivalent (MTOE). In Sudan, Libya and Mauritania, woodfuel is playing a pivotal role in the energy balance of the countries, and it still constitutes between 30 and 45 percent of the total primary energy supply. With the increasing population growth, reliance on forest resources has led to pressure on wood products which has put further pressure on forest cover.

E. Functions of Forests

Area and area change of the Protected Area system

15. The protected area (PAs) system in the NENA Region is sizeable, with the largest jump occurring between 2000 and 2005, although a few countries did not report information on their PAs. (Figure 5 below). While the data below shows a very slight increase in protected areas in 2015, these trends can only be verified for the area included in Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Mauritania, Qatar, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen.

Figure 5: NENA Protected Areas since 1990



Area of forests designated for the protection of soil and water

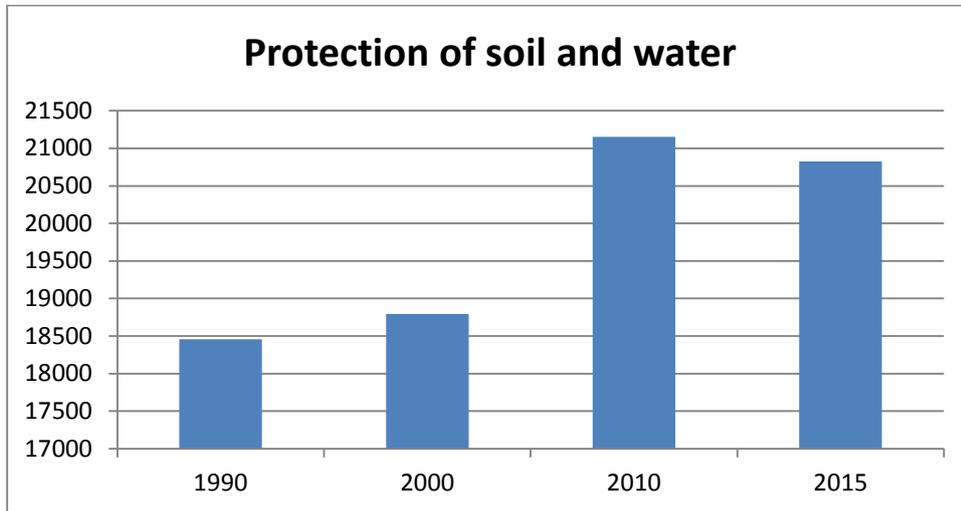
16. Figure 6 below shows there is positive evolution of the size of forests assigned to the protection of soil and water in the region. In 1990, the forest area assigned to the soil and water

⁷ FAO, 2012, Experiences of Near East Countries on Utilization and Processing of Non- Wood Forest Products: Cases of Gum Arabic, Bee-Honey, Pistachios, Rosemary & Stone Pine

⁸ SOFO, 2014, State of the World Forests 2014: Enhancing the socioeconomic benefits from forests

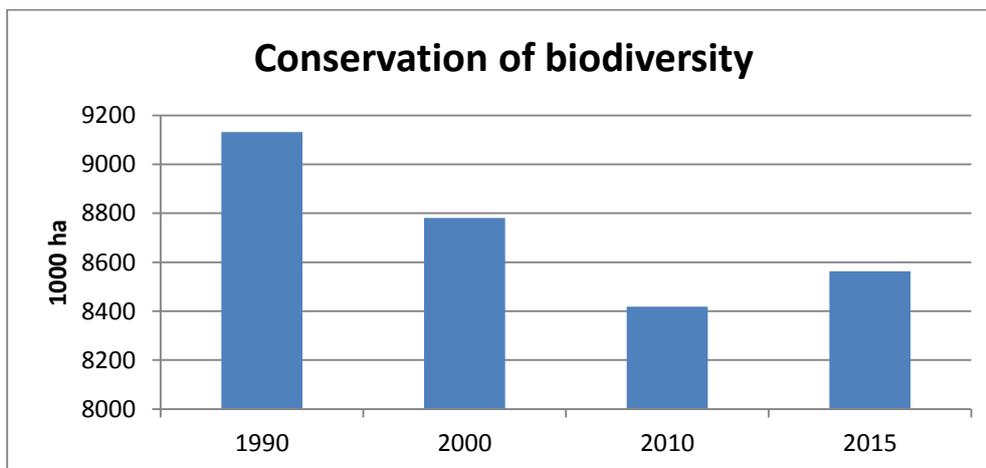
protection was estimated at 42.7 percent. 25 years later that proportion of the forest has significantly increased reaching nearly 50 percent.

Figure 6: Forests area designated for the protection of soil and water



17. Overall trends for protection of biodiversity in the NENA region has slightly improved over the last five years. Nevertheless, there has been a 6.2 percent reduction in land set aside for biodiversity conservation in the last 25 years. With the effects of climate change, deforestation and forest degradation growing around the world, the region can be expected to face negative effects on biodiversity and data from FRA suggests biodiversity loss is likely to continue worldwide. However, integrating the protection of biodiversity into national and local development programmes can help promote a more systematic view of biodiversity conservation. In addition, applying sustainable forest management practices in all forest and range areas will improve the possibility to enhance biodiversity conservation.

Figure 7: Forests area designated for the conservation of biodiversity



F. Conclusions

18. Most countries in the NENA Region lack the capacity to collect and report timely and reliable data on forest resources, forest and land-use change, forest uses and users. This is important for the improvement of national policy and planning needs as well as for reporting at national level and to regional and international processes.

19. Near East and North Africa countries are among the least gifted with forestry resources and they are also among those with the most scant information. One of the main conclusions of the FRA 2000, confirmed by FRA 2005 and later on, was that forestry information in the NENA Region is still poor and most countries have difficulties in reporting on their resources. For example, in the past two decades only six countries provided reports with information collected through national field surveys. Another four countries, including those with the greatest forest cover such as Sudan and Iran, based their reports on forest maps only.

G. Points for discussion and consideration

20. The Commission may wish to invite countries to:

- Raise awareness of policy makers on the importance of forestry for countries' economic development and the well-being of their society in particular to rural people and the potential that the sector holds in poverty reduction and improve livelihoods.
- Identify major challenges facing sustainable forest management practices, explore possible approaches to tackle these challenges including by seeking innovative approaches for increasing investment in the forestry sector, and continue strong reporting efforts via the CFRQ.

21. The Commission may wish to recommend that FAO support countries by:
- Strengthening countries' capacities and providing technical support in forest assessment and monitoring and in improving their data on the valuation of NWFPs and their contribution to both rural and national economies and to sustainable development.
 - Supporting countries in developing/updating their forest policies/strategies and in strengthening their forest governance system.