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Organización  
de las  
Naciones  
Unidas  
para la  
Agricultura  
y la  
Alimentación

## NEAR EAST FORESTRY COMMISSION

### EIGHTEENTH SESSION

**KHARTOUM, REPUBLIC OF THE SUDAN**  
**18-21 February 2008**

## SUSTAINABLE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE NEAR EAST ARID AND SEMI-ARID ECOSYSTEMS

### MANAGEMENT OF FORESTS AND RANGELANDS

1. Forestry in the Near East Region is closely related to range management and control of land degradation and desertification. The Near East Forestry Commission (NEFC) members have recommended closer integration of forestry and range activities and programmes, including those supported by FAO, and that range issues be integrated in the Commission's work.
2. Forestry and range experts of 10 Near East countries met in Cairo, Egypt, in November 2007, to discuss ways enhancing member country capacity in range monitoring and the use of current techniques; and strengthening coordination among forestry and range sub-programmes, with a view to improving range data and information and enhancing sustainability of resources. They elaborated a working document comprising recommendations for RNE Sub-programme activities and guidelines for member countries with respect to range monitoring methodology, as well as data collection, organization and analysis. The experts also made specific recommendations for a collaborative regional programme for upgrading skills of national staff on range monitoring and the application of modern techniques, and for the establishment of informal regional network for range-forest practitioners. They expressed a strong renewed appeal to FAO for greater synergies between its range and forestry programmes.
3. **Discussion point:** NEFC members may wish to endorse the recommendations of the workshop and integrate the activities in the NEFC follow-up process.

### POLICIES, LAWS AND INSTITUTIONS

4. Over the past few years, laudable initiatives have taken place in the Region, geared to i) formulating or strengthening forestry policies and legislation or ii) re-organizing forestry institutions.
5. Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia have undergone sound revamping of their forest policies and legislation, emphasizing sustainable and participatory management of forest resources and

introducing multi-dimensional use of their forests. Jordan, Syria and Egypt are in the process of revising their forest-related policies and legislation.

6. The legal framework for forestry in the West Asia region varies among countries. Laws regulating forest management in some countries focus mainly on prohibitions and limitations, ignore planning, management, and development issues. Even though policies in these countries constantly emphasize the importance of increased public participation and decentralization, this has not yet been reflected in legislation. In countries which have the least forest cover in the region, forest legislation is limited to general environmental protection laws (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates), grazing regulations (Kuwait and Oman) and designation of protected areas for mangroves (Bahrain and Qatar). Forest and Rangeland Regulations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have been in effect since 1978 and deal with the regulation of protection and utilization of vegetation, forests, and rangelands. In addition to these laws, religious edicts also play an important role in the protection of forest resources.

7. Most of the countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus have developed appropriate legal and regulatory framework on forests. However, the fundamental problem of weak implementation of policies and legislation remains critical and this largely stems from weak institutional capacity. Management is still largely centralised and severe financial and technical problems are encountered. Often other government agencies play an important role in promoting sustainable forest management, such as those in charge of agriculture, economy, education and statistics. Responsibility for protected area management is under the same state agency/department responsible for forest management in some countries, while in others it is scattered throughout different institutions. Private sector involvement in forestry, especially in ownership and management of forests, is limited. As the pace of urbanisation accelerates, and use of waste water for irrigation is being generalized, countries in the region are paying increasing attention to urban forestry, especially through establishing green spaces.

8. In this respect, national decision-makers could consider the following aspects and options:

- enhancing integrated land-use planning
- supporting investments by private forest and other wooded land-owners
- stimulating the diversification of markets for forest products and services
- creation of an independent Government Agency (Forest Office).

#### **Discussion points:**

9. NEFC members may want to formulate specific recommendations, including FAO support, to achieve the above listed objectives and consider specifically ways to:

- enhance integrated approaches to sustainable management and use of natural resources;
- strengthen national forest and range policy development and implementation;
- enhance related law formulation/revision and enforcement.

## **PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES**

### **Current situation**

10. Almost all forests in the Near East Region, with a few exceptions, are under public ownership. While forest ownership is not the only way for the rural population and other stakeholders to participate in forest management, management agreements on public forests can also provide such opportunities, participatory forestry in the region remains limited.

### **Opportunities**

11. With economic development, the rising level of education, dissemination of information and increased awareness of environmental issues civil society, there is a growing opportunity to engage stakeholders in forest and rangeland conservation and management. Existing capacities amongst stakeholders can be tapped to establish partnerships with state forest administrations,

which are much in need of finding such support. With their own capacity increasing, citizens are naturally seeking ways to be involved in decision-making processes which affect them. This social interest should be seen as an opportunity.

12. A few countries such as Afghanistan, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Tunisia have recently enacted or revised forest legislation which provides better opportunities for participatory forestry. Other countries are currently formulating legislation that follows the same trend (Algeria, Egypt, Syria and Uzbekistan).

### **Constraints**

13. One of the main reasons for the failure of past or on-going interventions in the forestry sector at the community level is the lack of trust between forest administrations and local communities. This situation often results from the forest administration's resistance to change and its lack of acknowledgement of customary rights and capacities.

### **Way forward**

14. The increasing role of the private sector, community groups and civil society organizations can provide new opportunities for the production of forest products and environmental services.

15. Participatory forestry however requires an enabling institutional framework. It takes time to change established attitudes, perceptions and practices. Innovations need to be introduced in a stepwise manner, giving all concerned – from central government ministers, to remote forest people – time to adapt to changes. It also helps to build a sense of ownership over forest resources among local communities or forest owners, many of whom have been alienated from these resources by decades of top-down forest management policies.

16. If forests are to be managed by stakeholders in ways that are sustainable and that help alleviate poverty, tenure rights must be clear, long-term and secure.

17. In the Near East Region farmers do not think in terms of discrete areas of forest and agricultural land, but rather in terms of an overall agricultural landscape in which there are trees. Thus forestry needs to be better integrated in other land uses, especially agriculture and range management. In addition, it is now increasingly understood that forests have a valuable role in other sectors, for example, in forest ecotourism and other income-generating activities.

## **MOBILIZING DOMESTIC RESOURCES**

18. Adequate financing is an important prerequisite for sustainable forest management. Forestry in the region cannot be commercially viable since current forest policies emphasize the ecological and social roles of forests rather than that of timber production, which is limited climatic, soil and other conditions. Therefore, forestry is often subsidized by other sectors of the economy.

19. The fact that the most social and environmental benefits of forests are not marketed makes the assignment of a monetary value to them difficult.

20. In October 2007, a questionnaire was sent to all Heads of Forestry (or similar institutions) in the countries of the Near East Region. The response rate was modest so it is not possible to draw conclusions but Table 1 below provides an indication of the range and amount of funding for forestry in selected countries and illustrates the weakness of the budget allocated to forestry.

21. In most of the countries of the Near East, national budgetary allocations for development of forestry are insufficient. Forestry is usually funded through the regular budget, the development budget, and sometimes through extra-budgetary funds, grants and loans.

22. With the presence of a large number of oil and gas producer countries, the Near East is considered as being among the wealthier regions of the world and some institutions are providing significant financial support to many developing countries. This situation, coupled with armed conflicts in some countries, makes it difficult for the Region to attract international support to forestry and natural resources development.

**Table 1**

**Financial Resources Allocated to Forestry in Some Countries of the NE (in US Dollars)**

Country	Forestry Budget		Other Institutions	Agriculture	Sources
	National	International			
Cyprus	56,000,000	2,600,000		55,000,000 (including research)	EU
Kinshasa	10,000,000 (excluding staff; including forest monitoring study)		51,000,000 Ministry of Municipalities	322,000,000 (including forestry staff)	
Morocco	135,000,000	20,000,000		257,000,000	Loan
Tunis	30,000,000	15,000,000	3,000,000	400,000,000	
Yemen	336,000		650,000 Public Gardens	192,000,000	

23. **The Commission may wish to discuss:**

- how to mobilize and capture funds for forestry, given also the growing concern about environmental degradation and climate change and the new funding windows that these may provide;
- how to enhance investments in planted forests and other tree planting;
- how to involve regional financial institutions in the funding of crucial regional and national programmes such as Programmes of Action for Combating Desertification, establishment of Green Belts and Integrated Watershed Management, to mention a few.