

PROJECT CONCEPT NOTE
« MEDITERRANEAN FORESTS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT »

Regional context : the challenges for the forestry sector in the Mediterranean

In the Mediterranean region, trees and forests are essential elements in the functioning of ecosystems. Endowed with a very rich biodiversity, they contribute to the renewal or the conservation of primary resources such as water, wood and non-wood forest products, soils and Mediterranean landscapes. They also continue to be an effective or potential resource in a variety of areas, including agriculture, livestock production, industry, handicrafts, urbanism and leisure. Thus, they contribute to the development of numerous activities and jobs in rural areas and help to combat poverty.

The southern and eastern parts of the Mediterranean Basin are still home to many rural communities, some of which are still growing. Nowadays, woodlands, which have always been an integral part of agro-pastoral systems, are too often over-exploited (over-grazing of rangelands, increasing of fuel wood consumption by local people). The continuous growth of such requirements often leads to imbalances and spiralling degradation (increasing demands placed on areas less and less capable of meeting them).

The main sustainable development challenges currently facing the forestry sector and for which it should give a determining contribution are essentially:

- ⇒ natural resource management, risk management and improvements on the surrounding environment (biodiversity, landscape quality, water resources conservation, the fight against desertification, erosion and fire),
- ⇒ poverty alleviation and socio-economic development of rural areas,
- ⇒ food security for local inhabitants (pastoral areas, non-wood forest products, firewood, timber for building).

Facing these challenges, the multiple functions of woodlands offer fruitful opportunities for environmentally sound development. Improving forestry sector contribution to sustainable development and combating poverty, thus constitute a top priority objective for countries of the region, and particularly those of Southern and Eastern shores.

Origin and orientations of the project « Mediterranean forests and sustainable development »

In its meeting in Rome April 2002, the *Silva Mediterranea* Committee (in charge of Mediterranean forestry matters) emphasized the necessity of a better integration, in the Mediterranean forestry sector thrusts, of the rim countries' concerns relating to land management and sustainable development. In order to facilitate this integration, it recommended to reinforce working relations and synergies between the different institutions working on these issues in the Mediterranean Region, notably between FAO and intergovernmental organisations and their specialised agencies in the Mediterranean region, NGOs and other sectors of civil society.

To initiate this synergy, aimed at reinforcing the contributions of the forestry sector to territories' sustainable development, the *Silva Mediterranea* Committee proposed that priority activities on a regional scale might be implemented jointly with « Plan Bleu », according to a partnership agreement concluded in October 2002 and renewed in December 2005.

Indeed, « Plan Bleu » (Regional Activity Centre of the Mediterranean Action Plan) has a mandate, on behalf of the Mediterranean cooperation, to provide the rim countries with systemic and prospective analysis enlightening them about necessary scenario changes which will allow « Mediterranean futures » to be in keeping with a sustainable development prospect. On a regional scale, in its role as a Mediterranean observatory for environment and development, « Plan Bleu » gives a technical support to the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development (MCSD) created in 1995.

To launch the « Mediterranean forests and sustainable development » project and support it during its initial phase, France decided to supply it with human resources and financial means for a 3 year period. This first phase allowed the concerned parties to commit themselves to the process of cooperation and sharing of experiences in which more and more countries and organisations are taking part. During the steering committee meeting of early February 2006, the representatives of the countries and the participating organisations formulated proposals concerning the activities still remaining to be implemented in order to come up to their expectations.

Report on the first phase of the project

The objectives assigned to the « Mediterranean Forests and Sustainable Development » project (MFSD) during the first phase were i) to appraise the situation of the various areas of interest based on case studies to be carried out in various countries and ii) to foster the regional sharing of experience by organising a regional forum on the Mediterranean forests and sustainable development issues (based on the results of case studies and contributions from experts and specialists in the region).

Some case studies have been achieved (Morocco, France, Turkey, Albania, ...). A regional forum on the theme of « Forestry sector and sustainable development in the Mediterranean : challenges, policies and governance » took place in Rabat from 24th to 26th November 2005. This forum gathered together over 140 managers, experts and researchers from the Mediterranean countries and from international and regional organisations¹. It was organised by the Kingdom of Morocco's « Haut commissariat aux eaux et forêts et à la lutte contre la désertification » and by Plan Bleu in the framework of its partnership with FAO and with the support of France.

The MFSD project steering committee meeting held in February 2006 (following the recommendations of the Rabat regional forum) made it possible to assess the first phase of the project and gave the possibility to learn lessons for the concrete follow up of the project :

Assessment of the first phase of the MFSD project : main achievements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of a common vision of the Mediterranean woodlands • Interesting case studies on territorial approaches • Very successful regional forum in Rabat • Responding to a real need for a regional cooperation • Giving a new impetus and dynamism to the <i>Silva Mediterranea</i> Committee



Main lessons learnt for the follow up to the project
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing and reinforcing case studies on territorial approaches • Having more in-depth exchanges about the obstacles and levers for a sustainable development of the Mediterranean woodlands • Communication about the project and its enhancement beyond the usual working groups • Strengthening the institutional and financial supports

¹ Refer to the following documents : « Conclusions and recommendations of the Rabat regional forum » (appendix 1) ; Memorandum by Mr. Jean de Montgolfier: « A few reflections after the Rabat forum ».

Towards the 2nd phase of the MFSD project : justification and strategy

During both the Rabat forum of November 2005 and the last steering committee meeting of the MFSD project in February 2006, all the countries of the region emphasised the interest of the project conducted in the framework of the *Silva Mediterranea* activities as well as the necessity for having a concrete follow up so as to continue and deepen the exchanges of experience as regards sustainable management of the Mediterranean woodlands. Under the aegis of the *Silva Mediterranea* Committee and in close link with its partners, Plan Bleu wish to meet this demand in order to strengthen cooperation among the Mediterranean countries concerning their common issues on forests and sustainable development.

The MFSD project should be carried out in close coordination with :

- The activities carried out by other thematic groups of the *Silva Mediterranea* Committee (dealing with problems such as the prevention and fighting against forest fires, sustainable management of cork oak forests, etc...);
- Other projects conducted by Plan Bleu in the framework of the Mediterranean Commission on Sustainable Development, and especially on the theme of sustainable rural development² (priority topic for the two-year period 2007-2008). A chapter of the report « A Sustainable Future for the Mediterranean - The Blue Plan's Environment and Development Outlook », published by Plan Bleu in 2005, is totally devoted to this topic and emphasises the place and role of the forests and/or woodlands in sustainable development ;
- Works carried out at international level, notably in the framework of the Convention on Biodiversity.

Proposals for actions in the 2nd phase of the project

Based on the conclusions of the project 1st phase assessment mentioned above, the steering committee proposed a number of activities to continue with or to initiate in the framework of the MFSD project activities³.

Four priority objectives were selected to continue the MFSD activities :

- ⇒ Continuing and strengthening the experiences exchange and enhancement with regard to sustainable management and the governance of the Mediterranean woodlands (objective ①);
- ⇒ Facilitating the definition, the implementation and the monitoring of national forestry strategies and policies that meet the needs of the stakes and principles of sustainable development in the Mediterranean (objective ②) ;
- ⇒ Encouraging the implementation of integrated sustainable development projects for the Mediterranean agro-sylvo-pastoral areas (objective ③) ;
- ⇒ Communicating about the project, to promote Mediterranean forestry and its stakes at international level (objective ④).

Topics to be developed in the framework of the MFSD project (through case studies at local, national or regional level) were identified⁴.

To meet these 4 priority objectives, and in coherence with the strategic objectives of Plan Bleu, the activities proposed for the 2nd phase are as follows :

² One of the 7 priority themes for the «Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development » (adopted by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention in November 2005) is the « promoting of sustainable agricultural and rural development ». One of the main objectives is to « assure the future of rural populations and reduce poverty by supplying the basic facilities/equipment and services, by diversifying the rural economy and by improving local management & governance ». The sustainable management of rural areas and of the natural environment in the Mediterranean, including the woodlands, and local governance are among the key directions.

³ Refer to the summary table « Proposals for actions to be carried out in the framework of the MFSD project (steering committee meeting of 3rd February 2006) » (appendix 2).

⁴ Refer to the synthesis « Topics of studies to be developed within the framework of the MFSD project » (appendix 3).

Proposed activities	Description	Priority objective(s)
Case studies (territorial prospective)	Continuing the case studies, extending them to other countries and innovative (new) topics. Some topics that could be looked at in more depth ⁵ are : ⇒ Contribution of the Mediterranean forest ecosystems to biodiversity conservation ; ⇒ Economic and financial tools (economic value of woodlands, remuneration of agro-sylvo-pastoral good practices and rendered services, cost-benefit approaches, etc.) ; ⇒ Tools to mobilise stakeholders in the field and to make them more responsible ; ⇒ Integrated and participatory territorial approaches, integration of territorial approaches with the woodlands' management ; ⇒ Planning and management of peri-urban areas ; etc. Methodological support of Plan Bleu to accompany forestry projects through the systemic and prospective analysis of sustainability (the “ <i>Imagine</i> ” method) ⁶ ;	① ③
National reports (or surveys)	Inviting the countries to write a national report (illustrated by case studies) on the inclusion of the stakes and principles of sustainable development in their forestry strategies and policies in the Mediterranean ; Proposing forestry monitoring/performance indicators adapted to the Mediterranean context with a view to satisfying the stakes for sustainable development ;	① ②
Regional analyses (in the Mediterranean)	Definition of the priority topics, selection and follow up of the experts ; Topics that could be developed at regional level (prospective studies) : ⇒ Forest ecosystems and biodiversity conservation ; ⇒ Relationship between climate change and Mediterranean forest ecosystems ; ⇒ Fighting against desertification and poverty ; ⇒ Financing (structures and procedures) of policies and projects ; etc.	① ② ③
Organisation of a regional forum	Strengthening the exchanges that took place during the Rabat forum in 2005, encouraging communication on the priority topics (desertification and rural poverty, assessment of the multiple services offered by the woodlands, territorial approaches, management of peri-urban areas, etc.) ;	① ④
Reference list of good practices	Synthesising the case studies carried out in the form of a reference Handbook of good practices (sustainable management, governance) that can be distributed especially to stakeholders in the field ;	① ③
Platform of Exchanges	Using the case studies carried out and the reference list of good practices, initiating the establishment of an exchange platform to promote exchange of experience in sustainable management and governance of the woodlands ; Designing a periodical information letter to present the MFSD activities and their progress ;	① ④

Expected returns

Benefiting from the countries' active participation, the MFSD project, in its 1st phase, helped to create a dynamic cooperation and exchange among the Mediterranean countries and, thus contributed to revive *Silva Mediterranea* Committee. The activities proposed for the 2nd phase will strengthen and consolidate this dynamic.

⁵ Refer to the synthesis sheet « Topics of studies to be developed within the framework of the MFSD project » (appendix 3).

⁶ Refer to the synthesis sheet « Case studies : objectives and proposed method » (appendix 4).



Exchanging experience among countries and enhancing « good practices » for the forestry sector in terms of governance and support to the territories' sustainable development will facilitate the defining and implementing of national or local forestry programmes and projects that meet the needs of sustainable development stakes and principles in the Mediterranean.