

Rangeland in Oman

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1. Introduction

BACKGROUND

Most countries in the West and Central Asia region (see Map) have low forest cover, and the overall environmental conditions – especially extreme aridity and water scarcity – are unfavourable to tree growth. Consequently, the direct economic contribution of forests and trees through the production of wood and wood products (including income generation and employment) is very low for many of the countries. The harsh environmental conditions, however, underscore the need to pay greater attention to the protective functions of forests. Land degradation, desertification, water scarcity and loss of biodiversity are the more serious problems, and increasing efforts are being made to address these issues with forests and trees playing an important role. With urbanization, there is also an increased awareness of the amenity value of trees, and many countries are now furthering the development of green spaces to enhance the quality of urban life.

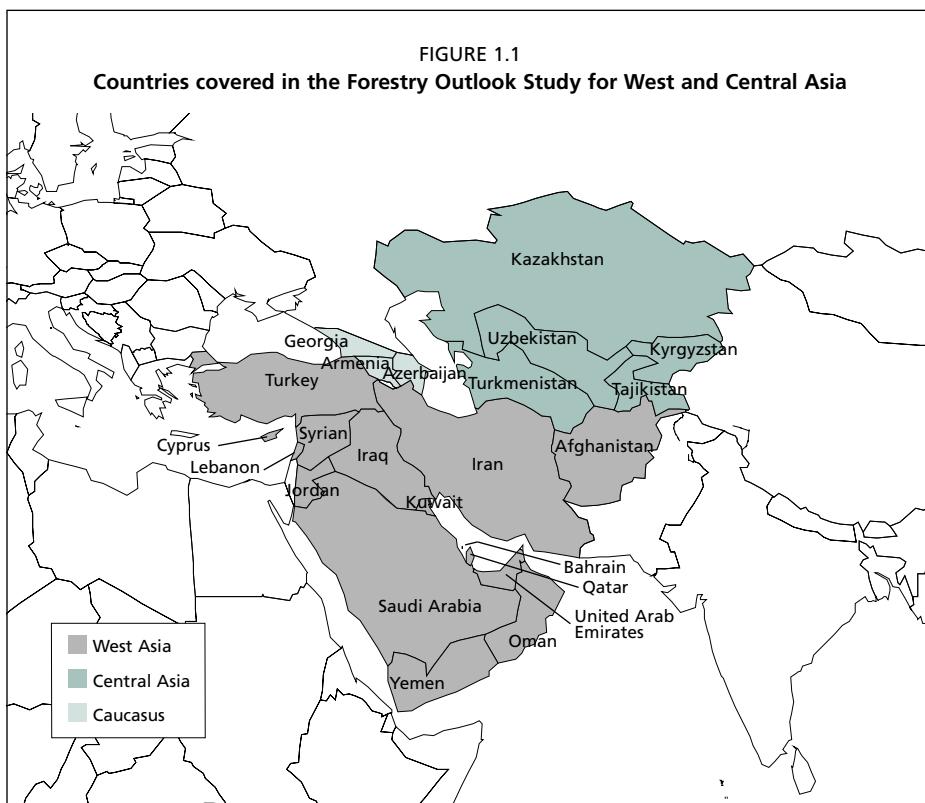
While almost all countries have ongoing programmes that support forests and forestry, the level of efforts differs depending on the nature of the problems and the ability of the different stakeholders to address them. Although what happens to forests and forestry will be greatly determined by what happens outside the sector, intersectoral issues are inadequately taken into account in the planning process. With the increasing pace of globalization, it is also clear that planning in the forest sector needs to take into account the larger regional and global situation. Understanding the emerging issues and assessing changes in this broader context of the changing society-forest relationship are critical to identifying the priorities and strategies and to ensuring that available resources are used more efficiently.

It is in this context that FAO initiated the Forestry Outlook Study for West and Central Asia in response to the recommendation of the fifteenth session of the Near East Forestry Commission. This outlook study covers 23 countries in Central Asia, the southern Caucasus and West Asia (Figure 1.1).

OBJECTIVES AND OUTPUTS

The primary objectives of FOWECA are to:

- provide a long-term perspective (using 2020 as the reference year) of the development of the forest sector, taking into account the overall economic, social, institutional and technological changes;
- improve country capacity in strategic planning in the forest sector by providing a broader perspective of developments at the regional and global levels;



- facilitate exchange of information and regional collaboration through networking.

FOWECA analyses the trends and driving forces that will shape the sector to 2020. Based on this analysis, the study identifies the policy, programme and investment options that can enhance the sector's contribution to sustainable development. FOWECA is designed to complement other forest-related strategic planning initiatives in the countries, especially national forest programmes. The study is particularly intended to provide answers to some key questions relating to the future of the region's forests and trees (see Box 1.1).

Adhering to the concept of broad-based participation, FOWECA followed a consultative process as it undertook the study. Every effort was made to fully involve the countries and the experts on the subject. Box 1.2 provides a brief account of the process adopted in implementing the study.

The main outputs of FOWECA are two subregional reports and a regional outlook report. The regional report examines the regionwide situation and outlook, and provides an indication of where the region's forestry stands in the global context. The subregional reports on the other hand provide an in-depth analysis of current and emerging issues taking into account the economic, social, environmental, and policy and institutional situation in the two subregions – Central Asia and the Caucasus, and West Asia.

BOX 1.1
FOWECA questions

- What roles are forests and trees expected to play in the region?
- What changes are foreseen in the next 15 years in forest resources?
- How should the forest sector respond to such changes?
- How are the demands for forest goods and services likely to change in the next 15 years?
- What are the options available to improve the forest situation in the region?

BOX 1.2
FOWECA implementation process

FOWECA was implemented as a consultative process involving key stakeholders, especially the countries in the region. Of the 23 countries, 20 nominated focal points to coordinate the provision of country inputs. Working groups established at the country level analysed developments in the sector involving as many stakeholders as possible. Discussions and analyses at the country level led to the preparation of country outlook papers. During the process, FAO assisted the countries in their analyses through regular communication, country visits and a series of workshops. The focal points participated in the subregional workshops held in their respective regions, initially for planning the study and subsequently to review the draft country reports. These subregional workshops helped to enhance interaction between the country focal points and to build up an informal network enabling exchange of information.

In addition to the country outlook papers, FAO also commissioned a series of reports and studies on thematic issues. These addressed some key issues in the region's forest sector, including policy and institutional changes and land-use dynamics; urban and peri-urban forestry; watershed management; environmental aspects of forests and trees; wood energy; forestry and poverty alleviation; wildlife management; and wood consumption trends. These provided focused analyses on a number of cross-cutting issues of broader relevance to most countries in the region.

Based on the information from the country outlook papers, the thematic studies and information from several other sources (including those collected by FAO staff during visits to the countries), a draft regional report was prepared and presented for discussion during the FOWECA regional workshop, primarily of national focal points, held in Istanbul in December 2005. A revised report that incorporated the various suggestions from Istanbul was presented to the Near East Forestry Commission (NEFC) during its seventeenth session held at Larnaca, Cyprus, in June 2006. This report takes into account the various suggestions received during the seventeenth session of the NEFC.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

Chapter 2 provides an overview of forests and woodlands, including their management and the policy and institutional framework. The benefits of forests to society, including their productive and protective values and the sector's contribution to income and employment, are examined in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 outlines the factors influencing the forest sector and their implications for the future. Considering the potential effects of various factors, Chapter 5 discusses the probable scenarios on the future of forests and forestry within the next 15 years. The implications of the different scenarios for forestry, especially on the state of resources and the provision of goods and services during the next 15 years, are also discussed in the chapter. Chapter 6 examines the priorities and strategies for the forest sector. Finally, the last chapter summarizes the key findings and recommendations.