

6 RURAL PEOPLE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AND FORESTS AND TREES

Most forests provide mainly environmental services, with very limited wood products, except in the cases of Turkey and Iran, where certain amounts of commercial timber are produced. The direct contribution of forests and trees to the national economy is negligible in most countries and the share of the forest sector in GDP is about 1.8 percent in Turkey (excluding income from NWFPs and the recreational services of forests). However, most countries report that forests and trees are particularly important to rural people, especially those who live in or around forests or wooded land.

6.1 Forests and trees, and rural people

Although many countries are highly urbanized, there are still more than 107 million rural inhabitants, accounting for about 38.5 percent of the total population of West Asia. The majority of the poor live in rural areas, especially mountainous forest and rangeland areas. Based on UNDP statistics, 48 percent of people are living below the poverty line in Yemen, about 75 percent of them in rural areas. According to Turkey's 2000 census, about 7.4 million people live in 19 577 forest villages, constituting approximately 11 percent of the total population and nearly half the rural population. Forest villagers constitute the lowest income group in society. On the other hand, forest lands and resources, which are the major natural resources that forest villagers live on, are owned almost exclusively by the State. Forest villagers often depend heavily on agriculture and livestock for their income, although they depend on forests for heating and cooking fuel and animal grazing. In addition, most NWFPs in Turkey are produced in wooded areas along the coast, and inhabitants of these areas are usually forest villagers with low incomes.

Although in most cases trees and forests play only a marginal role in reducing rural poverty, they do contribute significantly to poor rural people's livelihoods and to livestock production. Their roles can be summarized as follows:

- provision of energy for cooking and heating, and raw materials for charcoal production;
- provision of food, medicinal plants and other products for domestic use and commercial processing;
- provision of fodder and shade for livestock;
- operation of small-scale sawmills and other wood and non-wood processing factories;
- provision of employment and income through participation in forestry activities conducted by the government in public forest areas.

According to available data, about 40 percent of Yemen's land area is rangeland, containing about 16 million farm animals. Trees provide 50–60 percent of fodder for livestock, while 41.6 percent of the population rely on traditional fuels for cooking. Honey and charcoal production are important sources of income for some poor people. A national case study carried out in Iran in 2002 estimates that 5 million people rely on forests and forest land for goods and services, while the forest sector provides 7 453 permanent jobs and 12 831 temporary jobs to rural people. An earlier national study (1995) indicates that 25 108 households earn a total of US\$1.4 million per year (about US\$55 per household) by producing NWFPs from forests and rangeland.

Although the majority of people in Cyprus do not depend directly on forests and trees because of the country's economic development, especially that of the service sector, and the rapid migration from rural to urban areas, there are 53 forest communities containing 37 000 people spread over the country's various forest areas. Many of these people still depend directly on forests. Since these forests are publicly owned, local people earn their living by activities such as sawmilling, charcoal production, the production of essential and other oils from aromatic herbs and other NWFPs, logging, forest protection, fire-fighting, reforestation and the maintenance of picnic sites and facilities in national parks. However, the steady reduction in timber production from state forests has had a negative economic impact on these communities.

In the case of Lebanon, some forests, composed mainly of *Pinus pinea* and *Ceratonia siliqua*, are privately owned and in these areas the production of pine nuts and carob pods has been the main source of income for several rural communities. The production of oils for the soap industry and of aromatic and medicinal plants has also contributed significantly to some rural economies.

6.2 *Rural development, forest management and poverty reduction*

The Governments of Cyprus, Turkey, Iran, and Lebanon are stressing rural development, with a view to improving the livelihoods of rural inhabitants and reducing migration to urban areas. They are also trying to encourage local community involvement in sustainable forest management as a means of achieving this aim. Integrated rural development strategies, with stress on the involvement of the local community in forestry, are common in the development plans of these countries. Annex 11 provides a summary of rural development policies and programmes in these countries.

However, implementation of these policies is much more of a challenge. As mentioned before, most of the forests in the subregion are publicly owned. Rural people's and communities' participation in the formulation and implementation of forest management plans is essential for rural development. Most countries in the subregion face the challenge of ensuring that rural people benefit from forestry activities and that a favourable environment is created for them to develop the local economy, including local wood and non-wood industries.

Cyprus is currently implementing its Rural Development Plan and is facing the crucial issue of ensuring benefits for rural people, especially those living in forests and accustomed to depending on them. Some efforts have been made in this direction, but the reduction in logging has had a negative impact on local people, who have moreover not been involved in the new forest management and protection system. However, without the participation of rural inhabitants, the forest management plan cannot be effectively implemented.

The new trend in forest management for ecotourism and rural tourism development, in which forests and trees could play a major role, has been stressed in the rural development plans of many countries and could certainly benefit the rural economy and poor people's incomes. However, ecotourism development could also generate conflict between environmental benefits and economic benefits to the local poor. A participatory approach should be adopted to ensure that local people benefit.

Rural people's access to resources is another crucial factor in the effectiveness of forest programmes or management plans aiming at poverty reduction and resource protection. Recent surveys in Turkey show that the current contributions of forest programmes are relatively insignificant and that the factor most closely associated with poverty reduction is access to land that villagers can use for livestock grazing or agriculture. The inability of villagers to generate more income from forest management has led to reluctance to engage in forest conservation or development activities, while efforts to sustain their livelihoods by other means often result in serious natural resource degradation.

