

## **7 FOREST POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS**

### ***7.1 Forest-related international conventions and impacts on countries***

The countries of West Asia are very keen to join the now global effort to ensure environmental protection. International conventions relating to forests, such as the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC), the Kyoto Protocol, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the World Heritage Convention, have been ratified by most countries in the subregion. Annex 12 summarizes the status of ratification of international conventions and agreements in the various West Asian countries in 2006. Nevertheless, implementing the stipulations of these conventions requires financial resources beyond the possibilities of many countries.

By 2006, all the West Asian countries had accepted the World Heritage Convention, and CBD, FCCC and CCD had been ratified by all the countries except Iraq. The three main objectives of CBD are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits of the use of genetic resources. CCD was adopted as a follow-up to UNCED to address threats posed by drought and desertification to the livelihoods of an estimated one billion people in more than 110 countries. The agreement came into force in 1996 and is particularly relevant in West Asia with its vast expanses of desert, but progress towards safeguarding land from desertification has been slow in most countries. One of the main strategic challenges in the subregion is the limited capacity to institutionalize effective mechanisms for the participation of natural resource users in defining policies and designing and implementing actions to combat desertification.

Within the framework of FCCC, afforestation and reforestation qualify for carbon credits under the Clean Development Mechanism. It should be noted that Iran, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the United Arab Emirates have started to accept the Kyoto Protocol over the past two years, while only Cyprus, Jordan and Yemen had signed it by December 2004.

### ***7.2 Forest policies and legislation***

The general policy trend toward forest and rangeland protection throughout the subregion is reflected in the increase in designated protected areas, the reduction in timber production quotas, increased afforestation and reforestation etc. However, only a few countries, such as Cyprus and Turkey, have formulated or updated independent forest policies, national forest programmes and laws. In most of the remaining countries, forest policies are subsumed in agricultural, rangeland or environmental policies. There are also a few countries such as Yemen where no forest policy or legislation even exists, or is enforced if it does exist. Forest policy and legislative frameworks vary widely, but are generally weak, partly because of the low forest cover in many countries. However, the urgent need to upgrade forest policy and legislation in most countries in the subregion cannot be denied. Afghanistan, Jordan and Syria are thus formulating forest policies under FAO Technical Cooperation Projects (TCP), while Yemen is seeking support for the formulation of a forest policy and national forest programme and the updating of forest legislation through FAO's National Forest Programme

Facility. Annex 13 shows the status of the national forest policy, legislation and institutional framework of each West Asian country.

Turkey's forest laws have been in force since 1956 and the Government is currently preparing a complete reform package. Turkey's forest regulations are comprehensive, including measures for the protection and expansion of forests, and measures to secure cooperation between the State and the inhabitants of villages located within or near forests in order to ensure forest conservation while improving the living conditions of these people. Detailed regulations include the allocation of degraded land for forest plantation, tax exemption for private plantations and a reforestation fund.

Iran's forest laws have also been in place for a long time (since 1968) and have been amended several times since.

Cyprus has formulated a forest policy and national forest programme, and started a process of updating its forest legislation, laying the stress on environmental services and recreation rather than wood production. The new strategy has two main thrusts: multiple use (protection, recreation and trade) and sustainability (ecological, economic and social). A participatory approach to forest management and its planning is introduced in the proposed new legislation.

Jordan, Lebanon and Syria view forests as important elements in their environmental conservation and rural development schemes. Forest conservation and management policies are part of agricultural policy in Jordan and Lebanon, and part of biodiversity strategy in Syria. Lebanon has launched a five-year National Reforestation Plan with a budget of US\$16 million, while its long-term objective is for forest cover to reach 20 percent in 30 years. In Jordan and Syria, the concern of the international community is an important factor determining the priority given to the forest sector and the amount of resources allocated to it. Laws regulating forest management in some countries, especially Jordan, focus mainly on prohibitions and limitations, ignoring planning, management and development issues. Jordanian law emphasizes forest protection, supports management aspects that regulate timber extraction from state and private forests, and authorizes the Ministry of Agriculture to permit and manage grazing in state forests. Forest issues are regulated under agricultural and environmental law in Lebanon, although there is some specific legislation regarding forests, focusing on protected natural areas to preserve forest, plant and wildlife wealth, the promotion of NWFPs and limitations on fuelwood and charcoal production.

The Gulf countries of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have allocated sufficient resources for greening activities. Saudi Arabia has already prepared its draft forest strategy and action plan. Qatar's agricultural policy aims to protect trees and shrubs through administrative measures and the country also attributes importance to mangroves, declaring them nature reserves and encouraging their expansion. Forest legislation is limited to general environmental protection laws (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates), grazing regulations (Kuwait and Oman) and the designation of protected areas for mangroves (Bahrain and Qatar).

Saudi Arabia's forest and rangeland regulations have been in force since 1978, dealing with the protection of vegetation, forests and rangelands, and regulating their use. In addition, religious edicts play an important role in protecting forest resources. The Saudi Arabian legal system regulates fuelwood collection and transportation, and charcoal production activities through licences. The country's cabinet approved the establishment of rangeland affairs

committees in 1999, an initiative to encourage the participation of local communities of pastoralists and breeders in the development and conservation of grazing resources. A document was also prepared concerning the allocation of funds for long-term support to forestry activities and desertification control, with the participation of NGOs and individuals in programme financing.

Oman is preparing a new law to control human and livestock utilization patterns for forest and rangeland resources by preventing illicit use and conversion to other land uses. The proposed law takes traditional protection customs into consideration and encompasses consultation with local administrators, technical units and local communities.

Owing to limited resources in Yemen and Afghanistan and the current security situation in Iraq, these countries are highly dependent on external assistance, which in a way influences the nature of policies directly and indirectly. Forest regulations do exist in Iraq, but the political situation in the country limits the ability of the authorities to enforce them. In Afghanistan and Yemen, the legislative framework for forests and related areas is very weak. Several versions of forest laws were drafted between 1970 and 1991, but none of them was ratified, because no agreements could be reached among the many stakeholders concerned.

Forest policies and legislative frameworks are not usually comprehensive and systematic, since forest issues have been addressed only as part of national agricultural or environmental policies and laws in many countries. Only very specific forest issues, such as limitations on fuelwood collection, tend to be addressed in the legal framework. Forests and trees have been considered only as part of agricultural land or rangeland, so that policies and legislation on forest conservation are found only for the protection of rangeland or natural resources. Many countries thus lack a comprehensive development strategy for forests. In addition, decentralization and public participation in forest planning and management decision-making are not yet supported by legislation in many countries, although awareness of the merits of decentralization and participation in the forest sector has been growing.

### ***7.3 National forest institutional framework***

Government forestry institutions dominate the management of forests in all West Asian countries, since the majority of the forests are publicly owned. On the other hand, local communities and NGOs have been playing an increasing role in forestry activities. Meanwhile, private forests and the private sector's participation in forestry activities are being promoted, although they are still very limited.

#### **7.3.1 Governmental forestry institutions**

In most countries in the subregion, the majority of forest land is state property. The forestry department of the ministry of agriculture is responsible for forestry activities in most cases – although in many countries the “forestry department” is in fact the “department of rangeland and forests” (Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia), reflecting national legislation that treats forestry not individually, but as part of agriculture and rangeland. Turkey has the strongest authority – the Ministry of the Environment and Forestry, which is responsible for all types of forestry activity. Kuwait and Bahrain are the only two countries with no designated authority responsible for forestry. Annex 14 summarizes the

status of central and local authorities responsible for forestry in each of the West Asian countries. The central forestry authority usually has headquarters composed of various divisions with technical and administrative staff, and a local office in each province of the country. The general mandates of the forestry authority are to implement and enforce forestry and forest-related policy and legislation, and conduct such forestry activities as afforestation, reforestation, forest conservation and protection, and desertification control.

### **Centralized management systems**

Regarding the administration and management of the forest sector, the whole subregion tends to have centralized systems, with a top-down approach to planning and decision-making, although management systems do vary from country to country. Cyprus appears to have the most decentralized system, followed by Turkey, which is taking steps towards decentralization, while Iran is still in the early stages, although decision-making in the forest sector is still fairly centralized in the latter two countries. In Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, major decisions are made at the top level and implementation is carried out at lower levels, although efforts are being made to limit this centralization, especially in Lebanon and Jordan. For example, the reforestation and afforestation plan of Lebanon's Ministry of the Environment stresses the importance of coordination among all the concerned stakeholders, including local communities and NGOs. On the whole in most countries forest administration tends to be highly centralised, with most decisions being made in a top-down manner.

### **Shift in responsibility and cooperation among the various authorities concerned.**

A recent trend in many countries is to establish a ministry of the environment and move forestry to this body, mainly as a result of the growing concern for environmental conservation. However, the lack of a clear mandate for the various institutions responsible for managing forest and rangeland resources has been cited as a major problem in most countries. Competition, the duplication of effort and the lack of cooperation are the main challenges for future development in Iran, Lebanon, Jordan, Oman and Yemen.

In addition, in view of the multiple services increasingly provided by forests and trees and the consequent involvement of increasing numbers of institutions, cooperation among the latter is essential in harmonizing forest management. In Cyprus, for example, in addition to the Forestry Department, the institutions involved in forest management and related issues such as the management of wildlife, protected areas and the environment are the Environmental Service, the Game Service, the Town Planning and Housing Department, local authorities and the Cyprus Tourism Organization. However, in many cases in the subregion, cooperation among the various authorities or institutions concerned is absent or far from satisfactory.

### **Limited technical capacity**

The professional and technical capacity in the forest sector in most countries is extremely limited. One indicator when assessing institutional capacity is the proportion of highly qualified staff members. In the Department of Forestry and Rangeland of Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture and Food, there are only 196 technical staff as against 1 215 administrative staff. In Cyprus, only 25 of the 719-strong staff of the Forestry Department have university degrees. The lack of forestry specialists is another feature of forest-related institutions, especially in the Gulf countries. Further, the institutional capacity for long-term

planning and resource inventory is non-existent or weak, and needs boosting in almost all the countries. Only Turkey and Iran have a strong capacity in forestry expertise.

### 7.3.2 Emerging role of NGOs

The development of NGOs and their involvement in forest-related issues vary among the countries in the subregion, generally reflecting the overall political and sociocultural environment. Annex 15 provides detailed information on various NGOs and civil societies in certain countries. The main spheres of NGO activities include:

- raising of public awareness of environmental and forest issues;
- conservation and management of forest and wildlife protected areas;
- supplementing or undertaking of development tasks on behalf of government organizations;
- implementation of afforestation or reforestation activities or projects;
- provision of training or organization of seminars on forest-related issues.

#### **Box 10**      *NGOs in Turkey and Lebanon*

The Turkish Foundation to Combat Soil Erosion and for Reforestation and Natural Habitat Protection (TEMA) was founded in 1992 by two prominent Turkish businessmen with the main aim of raising public awareness of environmental issues posing major threats to Turkey's future. Land erosion, deforestation, the falling productivity of arable land and threats to biodiversity are the main issues the TEMA founders chose as their focus. TEMA develops and carries out model projects in rural development, rangeland rehabilitation and reforestation. However, education of the public on these matters remains the main focus. TEMA currently has more than 177 000 members and 555 volunteer representatives throughout the country. The main challenges facing the foundation are the participation of villagers, the marketing of products and project monitoring.

*Source: Ma .Q 2004a travel report.*

The Association for Forest Development and Conservation (AFDC) has been conducting a reforestation programme through which it aims to raise awareness among the local community on the importance of conserving natural resources and contributing to national efforts to increase green cover. Reforestation activities are carried out in partnership with municipalities, other NGOs, schools, youth clubs, volunteers and farmers. In addition to reforestation activities, AFDC organizes and implements various capacity-building activities such as workshops, seminars and training courses for local communities by cooperating with the Lebanese Mediterranean Forest Development and Conservation Centre. Capacity-building covers the following topics: forest fire fighting and prevention, reforestation techniques, environmental education tools and techniques, planning for ecotourism, management of natural resources, sustainable rural development, project development and implementation, and communication skills and mediation techniques. AFDC runs a tree nursery supporting its reforestation programme and produces some NFWPs as well. It is mainly sponsored and supported by international NGOs, the European Union and the Lebanese Government.

*Source: Lebanon country report, 2005.*

Most NGOs derive their support from governments or international organizations such as the Global Environment Facility, the World Wide Fund for Nature, the European Union, etc. or sometimes individuals. The ability of NGOs to bring about policy and institutional changes depends largely on the overall political environment, public support for the individual NGO and their technical, organizational and financial capacities.

NGOs are active in environmental and forestry spheres in Cyprus, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey (Box 10). It seems that some NGOs in Turkey have significant numbers of members, but the main challenge they face is that of ensuring that forest villagers and communities are involved in programmes and activities and benefit from these. NGOs are increasingly active in Yemen and Afghanistan, driven mainly by international organizations and donor countries, but their main constraints are their weak capacity in human resources and their high dependence on financial support from donors. Overall, NGOs in West Asia have a long way to go before they are able to function effectively to bring about changes in policies, institutions, programmes and activities, or influence decision-making by government organizations.

Improved access to information with the growth of information and communication technology will further enhance the role of NGOs. Support from international NGOs would further strengthen national NGOs and could to some extent unify some of the local and national issues. The increasing awareness among government organizations of the need to involve the various stakeholders, including NGOs, in their decision-making processes and activities will further enhance the role of NGOs in the forest sector.

### **7.3.3 Increased participation of local communities**

The formal involvement of community organizations in resource management is still in its infancy and there are only limited initiatives to involve local communities in the management of forest and tree resources. However, there is also increasing recognition of the role of local communities in decision-making regarding forests and woodlands. Communities are involved in the management and protection of degraded forests. NWFP production is the main income-generating activity in forests, and some communities depend on these products for their living. The current expansion of ecotourism and rural tourism has led to a sharp increase in income, contributing significantly to poverty reduction in some cases, a development with great potential in many countries.

**Box 11      *Community participation in Turkey, Cyprus and Iran***

In Turkey, there were 4 948 agricultural village cooperatives with 684 936 members by the end of 2001, and 3 199 of these were forest villages. Forest village cooperatives have been given special rights and privileges by forest laws since the 1970s. For example, they have the priority in receiving the job of timber production in accordance with the management plans of the State Forest Organization. These legal rights have provided villagers with additional opportunities to obtain further income and significant benefits through their cooperatives. About 287 000 members of the 2 100 village development cooperatives were involved in forest product harvesting operations in 2000. It was estimated that about 60 percent of total wood production was carried out through cooperatives during this period.

*Source: The Forestry Cooperatives Central Union of Turkey*

Forest communities in Cyprus play a vital role in the existence, protection and management of forests. There are 53 such communities spread throughout the country's forest areas. Their total population is only about 37 000 and is decreasing rapidly with the drift to the towns. The Department of Forests puts considerable effort into helping these communities by employing people, supplying local sawmills with timber and providing raw materials to satisfy their needs, for example for charcoal production. With effective conservation and sound management, forest resources offer multidimensional opportunities for socio-economic development, especially in rural areas. The Union of Cyprus Communities is a significant actor in the decision-making process. It is worth mentioning that rural communities contribute significantly to the preservation of tradition, culture, local architecture, heritage, family links and many other values that are lost as the population congregates in large towns.

*Source: Cyprus country report, 2005.*

Forest dwellers' cooperatives in Iran were established to focus more on forestry activities than animal husbandry. They are in fact considered a kind of social forestry because they are managed directly by local communities. At present, nearly 63 cooperatives are involved in the forest sector, engaged mainly in managing and protecting degraded forests. They urgently need financial support, but the Government is their only source of finance.

*Source: Islamic Republic of Iran country report, 2005.*

Some of the countries of West Asia have made efforts to involve local communities in managing forests. Although Turkey's Forest Village Cooperatives currently have very little say in how forests are managed or even in the price of products, the situation is likely to change with Turkey's entry into the European Union. The participation of local communities has also been boosted in Cyprus by giving forest communities a greater role in decision-making, mainly driven by the new rural development strategy to adapt to European Union standards. Iran has also established forest cooperatives, which are focusing on managing degraded forests (Box 11).

The tribal system used to play an important role in natural resource management in many countries of the subregion, but was reduced or abolished when public ownership of rangelands and forests was established. Some initiatives have been taken in certain countries to revive the system. For example, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon manages some protected areas on the basis of a traditional system, combined with ecotourism development. If the traditional tribal system were revived and enhanced, it could play a significant role in ensuring the livelihoods of rural people while protecting natural resources, especially in such countries as Yemen and Oman.

### **7.3.4 Development of the private sector**

Involvement of the private sector in forest management in West Asia is very limited, largely because of the predominantly public ownership of forests, the economic unfeasibility of forest management (low productivity of forests and high costs of afforestation and reforestation), and the fact that environmental services are the main benefits of forests and trees. Forestry activities tend to be confined to carrying out afforestation and forest conservation activities under contracts with government institutions. On the other hand, the private sector is the lead player in forest industries and also in the trade in forest products.

A few countries in the region, such as Cyprus and Lebanon, have a long history of private ownership of forests and woodlands. In Cyprus more than 38 percent of forests and 76 percent of other wooded land are in private hands. However, most of these forests are not managed, partly because of the small sizes of the holdings but also because many of them have absentee owners who have no interest in managing them. In Lebanon, private ownership of forests and other wooded land predominates, in many cases with management for pine-nut production. In Turkey, where the trade in wood products and wood processing are considered income-generating enterprises, recent policy instruments have been introduced to help increase private forest ownership from the current 1 percent to 10 percent. Private poplar and eucalyptus plantations for timber production have been encouraged by the governments of Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. In addition, most of the farm trees are privately owned, although in most cases there is no quantitative information about this subsector. Private forests account for about 9 percent of the total registered forests in Jordan and are mainly in the form of shelterbelts and windbreaks around agricultural crops. In many countries it is anticipated that the private sector will develop the potential of forest-based ecotourism.

### **7.3.5 Forest-sector finance**

Based on the predominantly public ownership of forests in West Asia, forestry activities are financed mainly by public investment. Levels of such public investment vary widely, driven by the country's overall economic situation and the extent of its forests.

In oil-producing countries, resource availability to the forest sector is generally satisfactory. For example, the Emirates Government has been providing strong financial support for large-scale afforestation programmes, granting subsidies and incentives to farmers for date palm cultivation and encouraging municipalities to green urban areas. However, there are questions as to the sustainability of such a policy because of the high costs involved.

Turkey is the only country in West Asia with significant revenue from forestry activities and this contributes about half the total forest budget. In some of the non-oil producing countries, forestry has been receiving increasing financial support from the central government, reflecting growing environmental concern within the country. For example, the Forestry Department of Cyprus has been receiving increasing budget allocations in recent years and has recently received extra funding from the country's rural development plan to subsidize private forestry, forest industries and the routine work of the department. In Syria, the Forestry Directorate has been receiving increased budgetary allocations to supplement its budget and the forestry budget represents 20 percent of the total agricultural budget. Lebanon invests more in rehabilitating its forests and has recently launched a national reforestation plan with a budget of US\$16 million for the next five years.

**Box 12      *Resource constraints in Jordan***

The annual budgetary allocation for Jordan's Forestry Department has remained constant for some years and barely covers staff salaries and the wages of seasonal workers, with very little left over for the development of forests, certainly not enough for any ambitious planting programme, improvements in the working conditions of field staff or the renewal of outdated equipment. The Forestry Department's functions tend to concentrate on law enforcement for forest protection and the staff are therefore viewed by rural inhabitants and the general public as officers of repression. Communications and transport equipment is limited, particularly at district level, making it hard to monitor field operations. Civil servants' salaries are low in comparison with other sectors and many staff with university degrees have found other career opportunities and left the Forestry Department.

*Source: Jordan country report, 2005.*

In some countries, the government is unable to support forestry, especially in a context of limited budgetary resources and the need to give priority to such social sectors as education and health care. Jordan is an example of such a situation (Box 12). Forestry activities in Afghanistan, Jordan and Yemen are mainly dependent on external support especially bilateral and multilateral agencies and international NGOs. However, such support entails problems with sustainability. In most cases, when the funding ceases, the project activities stop with very little follow up activities to sustain or maintain what has been done. Governments therefore need to take the lead in national forest development (Box 13).

In most West Asian countries, the level of funding to the forest sector is very low and undiversified in terms of sources. Investment from sectors other than the public sector should be encouraged.

**Box 13      *Domestic financial constraints and donor support in Yemen***

Yemen's General Directorate of Forestry and Desertification Control was established in 1984 with the help of FAO and other donor agencies, and was originally very active in many areas, including forest plantations, land and water preservation, nurseries and honey production. However, all the donor-sponsored projects have now ended or been stopped and no new projects have been launched, so that donor funding has dwindled drastically. The directorate has 120 staff members, with a total budget of US\$30 000, most of which goes to cover salaries. The directorate owns 62 nurseries with a production capacity of 1.5 million seedlings, but only a few nurseries are now operational, producing only 500 000 seedlings per year, because of the shortage of funds.

On the other hand, the Environmental Protection Authority was established recently and is receiving financial support from international donors. For example, the Natural Protected Areas Project is being funded by the Global Environment Facility and implemented by the World Bank.

According to a European Union report, the annual commitment level of the various donors amounts to about 10 percent of Yemen's total GDP. Donors play an important role in many spheres, including environmental protection, support to NGOs and community participation. However, most such projects are fragmented, ignoring long-term economic viability and institutional sustainability. Both the Government and the donors have recognized that the Government needs to take the lead in managing its natural resources, rather than pursuing donor-driven actions.

*Source: Ma Q. 2005b travel report.*

### 7.3.6 Forest education and research

Turkey is the only country in West Asia with forestry faculties in various universities, although there are faculties of agriculture or natural resources covering forestry subjects in Lebanon, Iran and Syria. Undergraduate-level forestry training is provided in Afghanistan, Cyprus and Jordan. There is basically no forestry education or training in Yemen.

Jordan's professional foresters are trained mainly in Turkey and Iraq, while technicians are trained in Syria and Cyprus. The Cyprus Forestry College provides a three-year diploma course, a six-month diploma course and a short training course not only for staff of the Forestry Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and the Environment, but also for staff from other countries inside and outside the subregion. Syria's Arab Institute for Forestry and Rangelands provides Arab countries with forestry and rangeland technical experts. The institute is currently improving its training capacities with the support of FAO, reviewing and adapting curricula, improving expertise in modern teaching methods and taking into account changes in the forest sector. Overall, forestry education and training in West Asia are insufficient and of a low level – the main reason for the lack of forestry specialists in many countries. In addition, training curricula need to be revised to adapt to new developments and techniques in the forest sector. Courses on forest policy and planning in particular need to be strengthened.

Research institutions in the forest, rangeland, agricultural or environmental spheres and universities are the main institutions carrying out research work on forests and forestry. Research is carried out on forests and forestry in Yemen, but research levels vary in other countries. Turkey has eleven forest research institutions apart from the Research and Development Department of the Ministry of the Environment and Agriculture. Annex 16 gives an overview of forestry training and research institutions in West Asian countries.