

Community forestry : Turkey

ABSTRACT

Turkey's forest communities, estimated at over ten million people, are one of the country's lowest income groups. For these communities, the most important economic benefit from the forest is fuelwood, used for cooking, heating, laundering and house construction.

Excessive and often destructive extraction of wood by these communities is, however, an obstacle to conservation and sustainable management of this valuable resource. It has often led to conflict with the Ministry of Forestry, whose mandate is to manage forests sustainably. The Ministry of Forestry has tried to establish productive forest cover through reforestation in degraded forest lands and openings in forest areas but villagers use these areas as grazing land and have prevented reforestation of several million hectares. The recent increase in migration from forest to urban areas has reduced dependence on forests and pressure on forest resources but it has placed strains on separated families and increased the workload of women in forest communities.

This report outlines the situation of rural communities, especially the women, living in the forested areas of Turkey and describes their activities in community forestry, including access to resources and services, participation, constraints and potential.

To guide community development in forest areas and promote sustainable use of resources, externally assisted projects have been carried out in recent decades to develop community forestry and participatory methods for the country. Since the late 1980s, concepts of "social forestry" and "community forestry" have been discussed and community forestry projects have been implemented.

A notable innovative experience was the Development of Appropriate Methods for Community Forestry in Turkey project, implemented in 1992-95 in the Erzurum/Uzundere, Amasya/Vezirkopru and Sinop/Duragan areas. The project tested and developed methods for participatory community forestry, village development and resource management in 20 of the poorest forest villages, which suffered from infertile soils and harsh conditions for agriculture and silviculture.

The objective was to establish resource management to improve the socio-economic conditions of forest villagers and reduce pressure on natural resources.

Training in better co-management of energy in forests was given through participatory programmes.

Field activities included provision of beehives, establishment of walnut nurseries, assistance with food preservation, construction of a fish hatchery, erosion control and introduction of participatory catchment planning and management. Most importantly, ways of reducing fuelwood use were demonstrated, including use of solar energy for communal laundering. Some of these methods of communal forest energy management have since been widely adopted.

At the start of the project, some foresters opposed unfamiliar and unconventional community forestry approaches. Constraints included lack of self-reliance, poor nutritional status and the low status of women. Acceptance of community forestry was fostered, however, through:

- participatory explorations of village problems and possible solutions;
- provision of skills in training, feasibility studies, group behaviour, marketing and economic assessment of activities;
- management methods to approve and fund components of household and community activities.

The project stimulated awareness of community forestry concepts and methods among villagers and foresters. Their involvement in activities led to self-reliance, improved income and a better protected environment, which may help reduce migration from rural to urban centres. Above all, the innovative experience has provided a model for sustainable forestry energy development for replication in Turkey and elsewhere.

INTRODUCTION

Forests and wooded land cover 20.2 million hectares (ha) of Turkey's 77 million ha and are 99 percent state owned and managed. As a result of destructive use, productive forests cover only about 6.6 million ha, equivalent to 8.5 percent of land area. The remaining 2.2 million ha consist of degraded unproductive forest cover and 11.3 million ha of wooded land. The Ministry of Forestry is responsible for conservation, management and use of forest resources on behalf of the state. Only one percent of the country's forest resources are privately owned.

Because alternative sources of income are limited, over eight million people in 17 000 villages in these forest areas are in the lowest income group. Annual per capita income is estimated at US\$200, well below the national average. Villagers are dependent on excessive and often destructive use of forests to provide

⁵⁹ FAO (1995).

for basic needs such as wood for cooking, heating and home construction.

This situation has led to conflict between forest communities and the government. The Ministry of Forestry has attempted to establish productive forest cover through reforestation of degraded forest lands and openings in forests but villagers prefer to use the areas as grazing land and have prevented reforestation, in many cases with support from local politicians, over several million hectares.

At the same time, increased migration from forest regions to towns has reduced dependence on forests and increased incomes. As a result, pressure on forest resources has decreased over the last decade. Migration has, however, put strains on separated families and increased women's workload.

There is potential for income-generating activities such as carpet weaving, handicrafts, apiculture, mushroom cultivation and marketing of non-wood forest products. These have been undertaken to a limited extent only, because of insufficient awareness, training and financial support.

Felling, extraction, transportation, nursery production, plantation and forest maintenance are the main sources of income for forest communities. Apart from regions where intensive harvesting and other forestry programmes are implemented, employment in forestry activities is seasonal and brief. Forest villagers have certain advantages, such as provision of roundwood and fuelwood at subsidized prices and some fuelwood for marketing. The amount of subsidized fuelwood provided by the Ministry of Forestry constitutes only a fraction of consumption. In reality, 10 million m³ are taken annually through illicit cutting from forests, probably the most important factor in forest degradation in Turkey. It requires attention and corrective measures.

PRE-INNOVATION

At the start of the project, some foresters opposed unfamiliar and unconventional community forestry. Changing these attitudes required clear directions from senior officers and convincing demonstrations of alternatives. Forest villagers tend to be conservative, individualistic and reluctant to work collectively for common goals.

Other constraints include over-dependence on centralized government, lack of self-reliance and initiative, low nutritional and health standards, inferior education and undeveloped potential among women in village organizations, decision-making and resource management.

Some of the constraints to raising the profile of women's role in community forestry projects *are* given below.

- The forestry service is staffed by men. There is no extension staff in the

Ministry of Forestry for rural communities.

- There are strict traditional demarcations of gender roles.
- Villages are male-dominated, with village government led by men and most decisions made by men.
- Seasonal migration takes place every year; from April to November there are few men in the villages. Women's household and agricultural workloads are therefore heavy for much of the year.
- Extreme poverty in most households leads to a range of subsidiary concerns affecting women, such as poor health, nutrition, hygiene and education.
- Cultural deprivation suffered by women, resulting from traditions, limits travel and contact with ideas outside the village.
- Women do not have experience of interaction in a group and it is difficult for them to concentrate during meetings.

INTRODUCING INNOVATION

Communities that are completely dependent on forest resources and lack suitable land for cultivation can only reduce their poverty by using forests more efficiently. Efforts to improve management should target villages that depend on forest resources that are insufficient to meet community needs.

Forest villages suffer from poor infrastructure in health, transportation and social services sectors. Shortage of water for irrigation and drinking is a serious problem. Existing water resources are not suitable for drinking.

The main economic benefit of forests is fuelwood for cooking and heating. Heavy demands on fuelwood create serious constraints to efficient conservation and sustainable forest management for present and future environmental, social and economic functions.

To guide community development in forest areas and promote sustainable use of forests, foreign-assisted projects have been carried out in recent decades to develop community forestry and participatory methods and approaches.

Since the second half of the 1980s, the concepts of social forestry and community forestry have been discussed intensively in Turkey. Some project work has been started in the last ten years and although prescriptive approaches were used at the outset, projects have become more participatory. Most recently, some community forestry projects, mostly foreign-aided, have been carried out in different regions.

Among these, the Development of Appropriate Methods for Community Forestry in Turkey project was an important experience for testing and developing community forestry models; it was implemented in 1992-95 in the

TABLE 1
Survey of those benefiting from the forest

Benefit/no benefit	Female	Male	Total
Obtain benefits	37%	27%	30%
Do not obtain benefits	63%	73%	70%
Total number of persons surveyed	203	640	843

Source: World Bank, 1998 Turkey forest sector review social assessment ECA/MNE social team

Erzurum/Uzundere, Amasya/Vezirkopru and Sinop/Duragan areas.

The project developed methods for participatory community forestry, village development and natural resource management in Turkish forest villages.

The objective was to establish resource management to improve socio-economic conditions in forest villages and reduce pressure on natural resources. Foresters and villagers participated in developing more effective and sustainable natural resource management through training and participation in community forestry. Demonstrations were given of erosion control, fodder crop production, grazing management, forest energy management and other activities. Activities had to be income-generating, because villagers could not spare time and money to improve state and private lands unless they gained some benefits. Traditional methods of forest management were to be supplemented by new methods of co-management of land, in which foresters and villagers would work collectively to improve social and economic conditions and natural resources. The activities involved changing the institutional culture of the ministry and personal attitudes among foresters and villagers.

The project worked with 20 very poor Turkish forest villages suffering from infertile eroded soils on steep undulating land and harsh conditions for agriculture and silviculture.

Field activities included:

- providing drinking water and minor irrigation;
- providing seeds for improved fodder;
- helping with rangeland grazing management;
- providing support for greenhouses;
- reducing fuelwood demands by providing efficient stoves and experimental solar and biogas installations, house installations and communal laundries using solar energy;
- forest energy management trials;
- providing seedlings;
- providing beehives;
- establishing walnut nurseries;

- assisting household food preservation;
- building a fish hatchery;
- demonstrating erosion control;
- initiating participatory catchment planning and management.

Funds came from villagers, the Development Foundation of Turkey (TKV), the Ministry of Forestry, County Governors and the Government of Switzerland.

Demonstrations showing improved methods for communal management of energy in forests were presented and are being widely adopted.

Women in forest communities

In most forest villages, the rate of permanent migration to cities in the last two decades has been 25-53 percent of the number of households. The 1990 census showed that most migrants are men, with the result that there is a disproportionately high female population in forest villages. Women are increasingly acting as household heads, thereby gradually changing traditional gender roles.

As more men work outside the village, women take over forest labour and other traditional male activities. Wood is cut and collected by husband and wife for most of the year, except winter. Women obtain more benefits from the forest than men and appear to attach greater value to it.

The major problems in forest villages are low income in 28 percent of households, irrigation and water facilities in 11 percent and health problems in 7 percent.

Women are major caretakers and users of forests, because fuelwood is used mainly for cooking, water heating, preserving food, heating, baking and bathing. Mushrooms, nuts and fruits are collected by women and children. Women also take responsibility for arranging the female labour force for fieldwork.

POST-INNOVATION

A range of methods was developed, including:

- participatory rural appraisals of ecological, economic, social and other village problems;
- participatory exploration of village problems and possible solutions, clarifying what can and cannot be done by villagers within the project;
- provision of technical skills in training, feasibility studies, group behaviour, marketing and economic assessment of activities;
- management methods to approve and fund household and communal activities.

If community forestry is to realize its potential to improve villages and village land and forest management in Turkey, increased participation in community

forestry and integrated natural resource management are essential. Conclusions from the project include:

- increasing awareness of community forestry methods among villagers and foresters;
- increasingly enthusiastic involvement of villagers;
- significant environmental improvements;
- the need to coordinate individual activities in relation to participatory catchment planning;
- gratifying levels of trust between villagers and forestry officers;
- improvement of skills;
- creation of immediate and potential incomes;
- development among villagers of participatory planning for environmental improvement.

Non-project villagers are now trying some of the activities, using their own funds.

Because of seasonal migration of men, it is important to improve understanding and visibility of women's roles in village organizations and decision-making with regard to planning, monitoring and implementation of activities and demonstrations. These aspects will depend on training in health and hygiene, education, extension activities and improvement of women's understanding of food sources and uses. These services to women affect the household quality of life.

Bearing in mind rural family structure and traditions in Turkey, approaches in training and extension for rural women should differ from those of men. It is necessary to gain men's support first by helping them.

LESSONS LEARNED

In designing and implementing a programme such as this, it is essential to understand the social and economic factors from the villagers' point of view.

- Villagers must be keen to plant "their" trees.
- Tree ownership is important, regardless of land tenure by villagers, the community or the state.
- Villagers generally prefer multipurpose species.
- Villagers must understand the marketing of products, and how – and how much – cash will return to individuals and/or the community.
- Communities must be responsible for the maintenance of "their" trees.
- Trees must be integrated with farming systems to supplement rather than supplant traditional agriculture.

Changes to a sustainable energy development model would have a significant,

positive impact for women in terms of labour, health, income generation and quality of life – all of which will help reduce rural migration.

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