

Participatory approaches to forestry in the use of non-wood forest products in Algeria

by Nedjma RAHMANI

The participatory approach in the use of non-wood forest products (NWFP) is new to Algeria and undergoing development. The Algerian authorities, convinced of the importance of NWFP in the battle against poverty among the rural populations and in the efforts to improve their income, have set up a national strategy for the creation of small-sized forest companies based on the sustainable use of NWFP.

Starting in the 1990s, the Forestry Service instigated a participatory approach, mainly within the framework of projects aimed at creating jobs in rural areas; later on, this initiative facilitated the implementation of a programme for rural development.

In order to make rural areas more attractive, the sector set up a plan for structural adjustment whose measures sought to find a way forward for the rural and farming economy, improve the standard of living of the rural population and promote the sustainable conservation of natural resources.

The overall approach to rural development is based on the principle of integrating all undertakings, as well as the participation of local stakeholders, into the very dynamics of the project, excluding no-one.

The approach adopted, based on training, making knowhow and information widely accessible and concerting efforts, facilitated a broad reconciliation between the general population and the rural areas and, also, the development of possibilities for production thanks to the diversification of income-generating economic activity. The efforts made in organising the populations involved around such activity has brought people closer together, creating links between them as well as with local and regional authorities.

However, even though the people have been generally integrated into strategies for local development, it nevertheless remains the case that



Photo 1:
Participatory approach
in the field.

they are little involved, or at least not directly so, in the management of non-wood forest products (NWFP). This situation is due in large part to the fact that Algerian forests are publicly owned and, also, that the potential of NWFP is hardly understood. Despite all this, the current framework enables would-be investors to set up local activities focused on NWFP.

In forestry in Algeria, the participative approach to the use of non-wood forest products is still innovative and a “work in progress”. Algeria’s determination to integrate the forestry sector into the wider economic system is manifest in the setting up of a new forestry strategy with a time-frame ending in 2035. Its priorities for the forest economy aim at:

- developing activities that get the most out of state forestry holdings for the benefit of the local residents, particularly by fostering investment;

- making the most out of, and the rational exploitation of both wood and non-wood products by bringing to the market wood, cork, alfa, medicinal and aromatic plants and wild fruit;

- promoting ecotourism and recreational activities;

- developing game hunting and field sports, including for tourists.

The overall initiative for the profitable and rational exploitation of both wood and NWFP is aimed at the local populations confronted by these issues and who, as people dependant on forests and woodlands for their very existence, will have priority in benefiting from the economic opportunities. This initiative is based on:

- the identification of niche activities and the types of population concerned;

- the creation of partnerships with potential institutions and investors;

- reflection on the types of economic incentive aimed at the populations involved with a view to ensuring their long-term commitment;

- improvements to the legal framework regulating the exploitation of forest resources;

- the establishment of economic sectors;

- the development of knowledge, training and communications related to forest products;

- the development of innovative funding mechanisms.

Within the framework of developing profitable uses, the regulations permit the authorisation of the exploitation of land belonging to the state’s national forest holdings for the benefit of the neighbouring inhabitants as well as of potential investors. This possibility, circumscribed by rigorous specifications documents drawn up in full respect of forest and woodland areas, encourages all productive planting of both wood and non-wood species as well as the domestication of aromatic and medicinal species via plantations.

It should be noted that, given the context of climate change and increasing aridity, the existing potential for non-wood forest products is not well understood nor properly assessed in the light of the risks involved in any implementation policy. Overall, the policy has the following features:

Photo 2:
Promotion of ecotourism
and leisure and
recreational pursuits in
the natural environment.



- Identification of the main NWFP: the National Institute for Forestry Research has drawn up a list of the main NWFP currently produced, along with the areas they cover;

- Setting up interprofessional committees for the cork, timber and aromatic and medicinal plants (AMP) sectors: these interprofessional organisations, which bring together all the institutional and economic parties involved in a given sector, provide a platform for dialogue, an agreed framework for the stakeholders involved and for proposals aimed at their final priority objective, the development of the given sector;

- Strengthening the regulatory framework by the revision and updating of the forestry legislation along with the reinforcement of the protocol for the authorisation of land use for developing the profitable exploitation of forests for the benefit of neighbouring populations;

- Intensification of training programmes for drawing up a simple management plan, for the approach to the development of value chains as well as specific training in grafting, plant nursery production, etc;

- Setting up and developing partnerships via: i) the design of a map showing the opportunities for investment; ii) the drawing up of a standard convention and a specifications document to govern the exploitation of forest products (wood, cork, PAM); and iii) the drawing up of conventions within the framework of assistance to young stakeholders in setting up small-scale businesses;

- Carrying out studies relative to i) a Guide to the Methodology for Drawing Up a Rational Plan for Exploiting AMP; ii) inventory of non-wood products by type of forest; iii) the feasibility of setting up a system for the tracability of cork and other forest products; iv) an analysis of value chains for cork, honey, turpentine oil and charcoal;

- A Programme for raising public awareness through the organisation of exhibitions, workshop meetings and the publication of brochures and leaflets. The objective here is to demonstrate to the wider public as well as to investors the opportunities offered by the forestry sector for investment and, also, its role in the national economy while at the same time respecting the integrity of ecosystems; to inform about the existing possibilities and aid mechanisms; the experiments and undertakings aimed at getting the most out forests; and the contribution of R&D in the development of the new sectors.



Examples of project pilots

Concerning pilot projects, some important projects should be highlighted:

1 - Pilot project for the profitable production of geraniums: thanks to a partnership between Tlemcen wilaya (western Algeria) Forest Conservation, the University of Tlemcen and an AMP Consortium (private investor). This is the first attempt at planting geraniums in a steppe environment, on 7.5 ha. Preliminary results have proved satisfying.

2 - Pilot project for the evaluation of biomass from aromatic and medicinal plants (AMP) in the Saida wilaya (western Algeria): partnership between Forest Conservation and the University of Saida.

3 - Project for the development of small-scale forestry businesses based on certain non-wood forest products in Algeria, notably rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), the caroub (*Ceratonia siliqua*) and stone pine (*Pinus pinea*): establishing a partnership formula based on the direct participation of the rural populations for whom NWFP constitute a large part of their income.

Clearly, the initiative for the Participatory Dynamic in Forestry in the Use of Non-Wood Forest Products is still in its infancy. Nevertheless, some persuasive results have emerged:

- the development of a viewpoint based on a “territorial approach”;
- the greater awareness of the general

Photo 3:

Experimental plot of geraniums planted in a steppe environment.

Nedjma RAHMANI
Ministry
of Agriculture,
Rural Development
and Fishing
Department of Forests
Algeria
nedjmarahmani70@
gmail.com

public as to the importance of the protection and use of NWFP;

- the setting up of private/government partnerships for the exploitation of forest products;
- the emergence of an integrated approach in the controlled exploitation of NWFP;
- the profitable recourse to local understanding and knowhow in the exploitation of NWFP.

Major challenges remain, however, in the construction of the NWFP sector. These include:

- the creation of businesses specialising in the services accompanying all exportation, ranging from the identification of international norms and standards to targeting clients and negotiating; and meeting the demands of national formalities;
- launching the exploitation of NWFP following on their domestication;
- identifying an approach capable of integrating NWFP into forestry use and development plans;
- implementing a system designed to enable a part of forest-derived income to be

devoted to forest conservation and management.

Additionally, given the obvious importance of NWFP in the battle against poverty and in the enhancement of the income and resources of the inhabitants whose lives are closely linked to forested zones, a national strategy has been initiated for the creation of small-scale businesses within a framework for the sustainable use of NWFP; this initiative is being prepared via a project in cooperation with the FAO ("Project for the development of small-scale businesses based on certain NWFP in Algeria").

To accomplish this project, solid partnerships must be established and research carried out during the whole process of setting up this sector; structuring and training must also be ensured for the forests' and woodlands' neighbouring populations, facilitating the creation of small-scale businesses capable of contributing to the profitable exploitation of NWFP while respecting the preservation of existing potential and natural ecosystems.

N.R.

Summary

The participatory approach in the use of non-wood forest products (NWFP) is new to Algeria and undergoing development. The approach adopted for the profitable use and rational exploitation of forest products, both wood and non-wood, is aimed at the local populations whose existence is heavily dependent on forests. Regulations currently in effect permit the authorisation of the use of forested land and encourage all planting for both wood and non-wood production as well as that aimed at the domestication of aromatic and medicinal species. The scope of the scheme includes, in particular, the identification of the main NWFP, the establishment of inter-professional committees, the reinforcement of the regulatory framework and setting up partnerships.

Given the importance of NWFP in the battle against poverty among the rural populations and in the efforts to improve their income, a national strategy is being set up for the creation of small-sized forest companies based on the sustainable use of NWFP.

Résumé

L'approche participative dans l'utilisation des produits forestiers non ligneux est une approche nouvelle et en construction en Algérie. La démarche adoptée pour la valorisation et l'exploitation rationnelle des produits forestiers ligneux et non ligneux cible les populations locales dont l'existence dépend de la forêt. La réglementation en cours permet de délivrer des autorisations d'usage sur les terres forestières et encourage toutes les plantations productives ligneuses et non ligneuses ainsi que celles visant la domestication des plantes aromatiques et médicinales. Le dispositif mis en place vise notamment l'identification des principaux PFNL, la mise en place des comités interprofessionnels, le renforcement des dispositifs réglementaires et la construction de partenariat.

Etant convaincus de l'importance des PFNL dans la lutte contre la pauvreté et l'amélioration des conditions de revenus des populations rurales, une stratégie nationale pour la création de micro-entreprises forestières basées sur l'exploitation durable des produits forestiers non ligneux est en cours de préparation.