

Social Innovation in forest

by Patricia R. SFEIR, Valentino MARINI GOVIGLI,
Riccardo DA RE & Bassam KANTAR

The VIth Mediterranean Forest Week held in Lebanon, featured the Social Innovation in Forests by SEEDS-Int and EFIMED and focused on providing a clear understanding of Social Innovation in the Mediterranean forests including key indicators and real case studies from the Mediterranean region.

During the VIth Mediterranean Forest Week, the panel « Social Innovation in Forests (SI) » was moderated by Patricia R. Sfeir (Programs manager at SEEDS-Int), and included presentations from SIMRA (*Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas*) researchers, Riccardo Da Re (researcher at UNIPD), and Valentino Marini Govigli (junior researcher at EFIMED), as well as experts such as Bassam Kantar (SEEDS-int). It included a special section on presenting real case studies of SI from the Mediterranean region.

More than 35 participants attended the session and learned about Social Innovation and key indicators while also acquiring knowledgeable information about innovative cases.

Social Innovation in Marginalized Rural Areas (SIMRA) is a four-year project (2016-20) funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Programme. SIMRA's main objective is to identify and map the key variables that are desirable for Social Innovation occurrence so as to highlight the elements for success and failure and develop methods for their appraisal and assessment.

SI aims to increase human wellbeing, responding to social demands that markets or existing institutions do not traditionally address. Through SI, diverse actors, including civil society, entrepreneurs and policy makers, create or reconfigure social arrangements or networks with the goal of enhancing development outcomes with respect to the economy, society and the environment. SI can introduce new solutions to challenges faced by Marginalized Rural Areas.

Two initiatives from the region were showcased during the session through a discussion panel moderated by Mrs. Patricia R. Sfeir :

- One of the case studies featured during this session was “The National Tree Planting Program” (NTPP) initiative from Lebanon presented by the founders Mrs. Emilie Feghali and Mrs. Nadine Abi Saab. (Figure 1).

- Mrs. Arbia Labidi, an expert in Social Innovative at the FAO, presented an innovative initiative from Tunisia on “Marketing Analysis and Development Approach (MD&A) for Non-Wood forest product marketing in Tunisian forests”.

National Tree Planting Program (NTPP) by SEEDS-Int in Lebanon

by Emilie Feghali and Nadine Abi Saab

The National Tree Planting Program (NTPP) initiative from Lebanon is a private initiative led by a group of concerned citizens, three Lebanese women, who wish to contribute to the Lebanese government’s national environmental efforts as well as to the private sector for the benefit of the environment and, most importantly, that of future generations.

The current alarming environmental situation in Lebanon and the weak reforestation efforts have triggered the custodians of the program to come up with the NTPP initiative. It is about mobilizing the biggest human capital possible, Lebanese youth, and engage them in a sustainable tree-planting

program that seeks to ensure the continuous reforestation of lands across Lebanon.

Young people would contribute once in their school life and a second time during their university career and would protect their environment by the self-funded sustainable program that is NTPP. In addition, the students would engage and mobilize their community in activities that would help them raise funds to cover the reforestation activities they undertake.

The project custodians aim to conduct a three-year Pilot Project for testing the viability of the NTPP, defining its collaboration and implementation mechanisms with different stakeholders, setting timelines, resource needs and measuring success.

Every student is entitled to raise funds by his own means to plant one tree or more in Lebanese forests. This applies to university students and would require the drafting and application of a legal and institutional framework to support the present suggestion.

The NTPP is in line with many initiatives already undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) such as the Community Service project and the Environmental Education Strategy and contributes to the Ministry of Agriculture’s (MoA) commitment to the 40 Million Forest Trees Program.

Photo 1 :

Mrs. Feghali, Mrs. Abi Saab and Mrs. Labidi presenting their cases during the Social Innovation session at the 6MFW. Photo by Pilar Valbuena.



Photo 2 :

Local Forest Communities
in Tunisia.
Photo by Arbia Labidi.



Marketing Analysis and Development approach for Non-Wood forest product marketing in Tunisian forests

by Arbia Labidi, Mohamed Bengoumi (FAO Tunisia)

Tunisian forest populations represent more than 20% of the country's rural population and rely heavily on forests for their livelihoods, including the exploitation of non-wood forest products (NWFPs). NWFPs are marketed at local, national, regional and international levels mainly through informal markets.

The commercialization of NWFP through informal markets remains the main problem for sustainable management of forest resources and empowerment of forest communities (women and youth). Thus, raising awareness among decision-makers and managers of forest resources would support the development of a strategy for the promotion of NWFPs contributing to the sustainable management of resources and the empowerment of forest-neighboring communities.

In 2011, the Ministry of Agriculture in Tunisia requested the support of the FAO for implementing a project aiming at promoting NWFP micro-enterprises for improving forest communities' livelihood while contributing to the sustainable management of forest resources in Tunisia. The FAO contributed to the implementation of National Forestry Strategy and the valorization of NWFPs through favoring the establishment of NWFP micro-enterprises managed by local communities.

The FAO worked also on creating an environment suited to fostering micro-enterprises, reviewed the legal framework allowing the access and use of NWFPs. The National strategy for the valorization of NWFPs has been designed accordingly. The FAO acted as catalyst to strengthen capacities of concerned national institutions and forest communities in identifying the non-wood products that would benefit the local communities.

Innovation was about using the participatory approach of the framework Market Development Approach (MD&A) and included mainly the capacity building of concerned stakeholders and the establishment of micro-enterprise by forest community member (women, youth). This all represents an innovation and a new start for Tunisia.

According to this innovative approach, the FAO reinforced the capacities of national institutions and local communities to establish and manage forest micro-enterprises. A public/private partnership programme for forestry communities was implemented.

The innovative process of reconfiguration was to facilitate the environment for the management and the sustainable use of NWFP (revising laws and strategy) and creating sustainable NWFP micro-enterprises.

Conclusion

In conclusion, speaking out for Social Innovation, Valentino Govigli stated: "Social innovation can be the key for sustaining Mediterranean Forests. Nonetheless, flexible frameworks are needed to provide evidence of what is feasible to support practitioners and policy makers in assisting SI initiatives. As these cases make clear, local actors should be supported in sharing information and best practices, and to achieve funding lines in order to strengthen existing embryos of SI into long-term, successful initiatives. Only in such a way can we turn a perceived buzzword into a powerful concept, imperative for the future well-being of our Mediterranean society."

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