

New Perspectives for Mediterranean Forests

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In 2013, the countries of the Mediterranean Region gathered together to draft a Strategic Framework for Mediterranean Forests, defining priority action to undertake in response to global changes. At this very time, the opportunities provided by such international institutions as the Union for the Mediterranean and the Centre for Mediterranean Integration, and by the main donors, appeared as an effective launching pad for the implementation of the recommendations detailed in the Strategic Framework.

Introduction

The session of the 4th Mediterranean Forest Week held on March 19, 2015, which brought together the international bodies and main donors (both bi- and multilateral), was without a doubt one of the key moments of this conference devoted to Mediterranean forests and woodlands: the perspectives arising from the occasion augur for a very positive response to the challenges facing Mediterranean forests and woodlands.

This session, chaired by Eduardo Rojas Briales, Assistant Director General, Forestry Department at the FAO, gave those taking part the chance to reply to the following questions: How can financial resources be better mobilized? How to build a better regional coordination for the implementation of sub-regional and inter-sectorial programs and/or projects in forested Mediterranean landscapes?

A context, a roadmap

Based on data contained in the FAO study *The State of Mediterranean Forests*, published in 2013, and on work carried out with Mediterranean countries, a Strategic Framework for Mediterranean Forests (SFMF) was adopted by the Tlemcen Declaration of 2013. It presents a series of recommendations, approved by the Mediterranean countries and by all others involved, constituting a response in appropriate strategic, political and technical terms to the issues involved in a fragile Mediterranean context now facing serious threats.

These threats, deriving from pressures linked to human pressures from socio-economic crises and from climate change, are in fact already a reality for Mediterranean forests and woodlands and have become so many challenges: the SFMF is made up of nine strategic lines of action aimed at the adaptation of forest ecosystems and at limiting the impact of such threats. Of the nine lines of action, three focus on reinforcing

stakeholder capabilities and mobilizing the resources needed for the sustainable management of Mediterranean woodland and forest ecosystems:

- through the development of knowledge and understanding of, training for and communication about Mediterranean forests (line of action 7);
- by reinforcing international cooperation on Mediterranean forests (line of action 8);
- by adopting and reinforcing the funding mechanisms already in existence and developing other innovative measures in order to back up the policies and strategies related to Mediterranean forests (line of action 9);
- by disseminating and building upon the results of the work undertaken and the projects implemented in the Mediterranean forests and woodlands.

While today the reinforcement of capability has effectively begun, commitments from the Union for the Mediterranean and the Centre for Integration in the Mediterranean Region represent an outstanding opportunity to reinforce regional cooperation and intersectorial collaboration on issues involving Mediterranean forests.

Converging objectives and reinforcement of regional cooperation

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), set up in 2008 by forty-three European heads of state and governments, is an international intergovernmental organization conceived for regional action. Its main aim is to reinforce the functional partnership (launched in 1998 Barcelona Process) linking Europe to the countries of the Mediterranean Region: as a platform for interchange between all parties involved, the UfM seeks to enhance the capacity for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation by fostering relevant policies and practical projects. Alessandra Sensi, the UfM's representative and chairperson of the session, stated: *“What has now become clear is the convergence of the objectives identified in the Strategic Framework for Mediterranean Forests with those adopted in the UfM's ministerial declaration of May 2014 on the environment and climate change, namely: the development and promotion of forest goods and services and of the socio-economic bene-*

fits, in terms of conservation of natural resources, job creation and the improvement of quality of life for the populations involved that accrue from the transition to a green economy; optimisation of resilience and the capacity to limit impact in the face of climate change; and the enhanced ability to mobilize resources.”

It is on this basis that the UfM proposes carrying out really concrete collaborative action by providing a strategic platform for generating discussion and a dynamic aimed at:

- integrating the issues around Mediterranean forests and woodlands into the current debate on the environment, the green and “circular” economy and climate change;
- proposing the promotion and prioritising of projects with a clearly regional focus and impact through a certification process which will ipso facto reinforce the capacity of the countries involved to obtain funding from the relevant sources;

Such are the proposals that open significant perspectives for the implementation of strategic partnerships with a Euro-Mediterranean scope, working to the advantage of Mediterranean forests and the issues related to them.

There was also a presentation of the Center for Mediterranean Integration, a multi-partner platform, incorporating eight countries, including Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and France, as well as financial institutions such as the World Bank, the European Investment Bank, the German Agency for International Cooperation (*Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit/GIZ*), the French Development Agency (AFD), as well as two local government councils. The purpose of the CMI is to be the driving force behind a platform for exchange and for the pooling of high-level experience and knowledge.

Hervé Levite, environmental specialist at the CMI, emphasizes that few of the projects currently under way have been initiated by the World Bank in the Mediterranean region: “Yet” he says, *“forests remain one of the Mediterranean's emblematic subjects insofar as they are a core part of the message about “green growth”: they offer the potential for co-benefits and provide an opportunity to develop models for sustainable development free of irreversible measures.”*

Thus, by forming a collectively-held asset extending around the whole of the Mediterranean Region, from east to west, north to south, Mediterranean forests and woodlands can contribute to the fight against poverty and participate in economic development, a vital role given the urgency arising from global changes. According to Hervé Levite, now is the time for regional cooperation and for the integration of issues connected to Mediterranean forests into a broader, intersectorial framework. The challenges and issues highlighted in the SFMF and the partnerships set up around the Mediterranean, such as the Collaborative Partnership on Mediterranean Forests (CPFM), could be usefully shared and integrated within the CMI in order to:

- participate in the major debates that the CMI presently leads, namely: the “MedCop” conference; the case being made during the preparation for Cop21 in Paris for the major challenges and implications linked to climate change; and, within the overall framework, the reflection about climate-related funding in the MENA –Middle East and North Africa-region;

- foster meetings and exchange between the funding institutions related to Mediterranean forests and woodlands;

- sharpen the awareness of such partners as the World Bank and the European Investment Bank, thus facilitating the mobilization of their financial instruments;

The reinforcement of regional cooperation via development and exchange of knowledge and understanding is a reality that fits in exactly with the SFMF’s strategic objectives 7 and 8.

The possibilities offered by donors meet the needs...

The possibilities, in terms of strategy and financial instruments, currently offered by funders correspond exactly to the needs identified by the SFMF.

... by accompanying Mediterranean forests in the face of challenges from climate change

This in particular is what was highlighted by Lucie Berger from the European Commission’s General Service for Climate: the European Commission’s commitment to implementing action to limit, and to adapt to, the effects of climate change is manifest in its allocation of 20% of its budget for 2014-2020 to such impacts. With the European policy for neighbourhood, the setting up of cooperative projects, both regional and bilateral, as well as the various instruments currently in effect such as Life+ (2014-2020) or Horizon 2020, numerous possibilities exist for supporting Mediterranean forests and woodlands. Lucie Berger also stressed the positive effect likely to stem from the integration of Mediterranean countries into the dynamic platform for exchange that is the UfM , with the aim of promoting Mediterranean forests and woodlands: *“It’s a chance not to be missed if what is desired is a regional and transversal approach to forestry issues.”*

... by optimizing the sustainable management of forests around the Mediterranean Region

If the budget of the French Regional Development Agency (AFD) is 7.8 billion euros, around 11% concerns the MENA region in the form of sovereign and non-sovereign loans and grants and guarantees. The strategy of the AFD is largely to support sustainable development by adapting to the needs of a given country through concrete objectives, such as the improvement of governance or an increase in forested areas benefiting from certification, with the hope of extending its actions beyond the zones of tropical forest (at present, mainly in the Congo basin) i.e. into the sub-Saharan and Mediterranean areas.

Why reinforce its action around the Mediterranean Region? Given that the Mediterranean region is a “hotspot” in terms of the risks induced by climate change, the region is seen as a priority in view of the economic value of its forests and woodlands in terms of goods and services rendered and their contribution to national economies, and in view of the issues of sustainable development and adapting national policies in the face of climate change.

Currently, the main projects benefitting Mediterranean forests and woodlands concern Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey and Lebanon

but they could be boosted in both number and capacity: as Christophe Du Castel, head of projects at AFD, says: *“The topic of Mediterranean forests and woodlands would benefit from being integrated into a wider context based on the observed fact that projects are often defined by issues such as managing the water resource, damage to soils, guaranteeing food supplies.”* In fact, forest management is not only closely linked to such issues but indeed plays a major role in them. It is for this reason that an approach that is both better integrated and multifunctional would carry weight with funders... to the advantage of the countries involved!

... by proposing innovative funding mechanisms

From 2015 to 2018, one of the driving focuses of the strategic programme of the French Global Environment Facility (FFEM) will be to support the implementation of innovative funding for biodiversity and the encouragement of sustainable management in agricultural and forested areas while also favouring partnerships (associating the public sector, the private sector and researchers).

François-Xavier Duporge, secretary of the FFEM, clarifies: *“To be eligible within this framework, the projects will have to coordinate action in three spheres: promoting sustainable rural local and regional authorities by optimizing the production of resources; reducing the impact on ecosystems; and fostering resilience in the face of climate change by fighting against the deterioration of forests and woodlands, prioritising North Africa and the Mediterranean Region. Developing partnerships and establishing synergy with local and regional authorities through a dynamic of decentralised cooperation also features as a strongly desired support strategy.”*

In terms of strategy for financing the conservation of biodiversity, one way of helping guarantee efficacy is to provide additional funding over the long term. It is for this reason that the FFEM's new strategic framework for the 2015-2018 period provides for encouraging implementation of innovative financing such as payment for environmental services (PES) and, also, trust funds for the conservation of biodiversity, the development of markets favourable to biodiversity as well as mechanisms for compensation for damage to biodiversity (based on the paradigm avoid/reduce/compensate).

Set up in 1994 following the Rio Earth Summit, the FFEM enabled the implementation of 275 projects between 1994 and 2014, most of which concerned climate change, deterioration of soils and conservation of biodiversity, for a total 316.9 billion euros. It was within this framework that the FFEM cofinanced a five-pronged project with the five MENA countries involved in the CPPM aimed at *“optimizing the production of goods and services by Mediterranean forest and woodland ecosystems in the context of global changes.”*

Today, the FFEM's action strategy is particularly favourable to prolonging its commitment to Mediterranean forests. In fact, this strategy is a precisely-focused response to the needs identified in the SFMF, notably in its line of action 9: it offers the possibility of adapting the innovative funding mechanisms and other instruments, such as the PES and measures for compensation (cf. recommendation 4 of the SFMF's line of action 9), to the Mediterranean context.

... by reducing the threats to biodiversity and of deterioration of soils and by encouraging measures for limiting the effects of climate change

At a time when global changes are today impacting Mediterranean forests and woodlands, compromising their future, the fight against loss of biodiversity and the deterioration of soils have become priorities in the national forestry policies of Mediterranean countries and the various initiatives and dynamics they have instigated. By way of example, consider the National Strategy for Sustainable Development and Management of Forests conceived by Tunisia's Central Department for Forestry, the approval in Morocco of the new National Forestry Plan 2015-2024, and the preparation by the Lebanese National Forestry Service of a new National Programme for Forests. All these national policies fit in with the objectives proposed by the SFMF and are perfectly coherent in terms of the three spheres involved in strategy 6 of the Global Environment Facility (GEF 6), namely: reducing the deterioration of soils and the threats to biodiversity by encouraging measures to diminish impact of climate change within the context of the sustainable management of forests and woodlands.

In this context, the approach based on geographically-focused programming encouraged by the WFE appears to be the most suitable option for presenting a convincing argument and guidelines for the Mediterranean Region. It represents an ideal opportunity in relation to funding for Mediterranean countries aimed at implementing projects with a wide scope and thus reducing the threats their forests and woodlands now face.

In the same way, the strategy for action of the Turkish Agency for Cooperation and Coordination (TIKA) (which, since it was set up, has been involved in accompanying more than 13,000 development aid projects) fits in well with one of the SFMF's priority spheres. As Belgin Cagdas, representative of the TIKA, makes clear, among the real priorities for action in the sphere of forests and woodlands figure the management of catchment areas, the restoration of forests in decline and the fight against desertification, all aspects that were identified as priorities in the SFMF's line of action 6, "restoring Mediterranean forest landscapes".

There is still work to be done

However, while the strategies and the funding instruments fit in well with the priorities and needs defined by the SFMS, in some Mediterranean countries certain advances positively expected by funding bodies have not as yet been achieved.

Need for a better-integrated approach with greater participation as well as projects designed in close harmony with local and regional authorities

The ability of countries to propose projects integrating their various institutions is not always an easy matter. Yet, as Christophe Du Ducastel states, the AFD systematically signs its contractual agreements with finance ministries; this means it is important for ministries in charge of forests to make the ministry of finance aware of their strategies, progress and projects. Similarly, and within the framework of the mechanism linked to the GEF, a country's key relevant people work inside the ministries in charge of the environment with whom the ministries with

responsibility for forests must also necessarily work.

Overall, it would appear that one of the factors for success that enable countries to find the best responses in forestry matters is to work within a country in an intersectorial way, thus favouring the presentation of integrated projects in which forests and woodlands are very often at the core of issues such as the maintaining of the water resource, the reduction in the deterioration of soils or, indeed, securing the food supply, keeping as much as possible to a "local and regional" approach.

"The issue is repositioning forests and woodlands at the heart of a global, integrated reflection, no longer sector by sector with the approach that implies", said a representative from Tunisia.

Mohamed Quarro, professor at the National Forestry School for Engineers at Salé in Morocco, also notes that it is fundamental to have a participative approach, including in the search for funding: *"If we want to mobilise additional financing, we must be careful to recreate links between the forestry administration and the whole community of forest users."*

In addition, there is also another severe brake on a country's capacity for funding: revenues from forest products do not necessarily, or wholly, revert to forests and woodlands. This leakage inevitably affects a country's capacity to generate self-financed investment in its own forests: this was the feeling expressed by Chadi Mohanna, Director of Rural Development and Natural Resources at the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture.

Forging ahead...

Regional cooperation around the Mediterranean Region in favour of the cause for forests and woodlands could also be enhanced by optimizing the region's capacity for financing. Though opportunities for funding certainly exist via the programmes described above, optimizing the use of such finance, along with the benefits ensuing from it, by setting up a platform for regional funding is a promising way forward worth exploring, according to Ludwig Liagre, consultant with GIZ. Positive examples of such plat-

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forms already exist and could serve as a source of inspiration: TerraAfrica, Congo Basin Forest Fund, the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative are some. All of which highlight the spectrum of possible set-ups in terms of coordination, viable organisations and the involvement of beneficiary countries, all directed at the final goal which is to catalyse the quest for greater amounts of funding available to achieve the shared objectives worked out at a regional level. In this light, capitalizing on the results acquired within the framework of the CPMF on the basis of the SFMF can provide a solid foundation for such a platform. Here, then, are some of the ways forward suggested so that each and every person and organization involved –beneficiary countries, funding bodies, but also all stakeholders (research institutions, international organisations concerned with Mediterranean forests and woodlands, etc.)- can reflect on the following questions: What will be the added value accruing from such a mechanism for coordination? What form should it take? What should be its priorities?

Conclusion

This session was one of the rare occasions at which international organisations, funding bodies and all the attending countries of the Mediterranean Region can pool their strategies and their respective points of view on Mediterranean forests and woodlands. Such occasions should no doubt be more frequent in the future thanks to the commitment of the major players involved on the Mediterranean stage.

Summary

Whereas in 2013 the countries of the Mediterranean Rim met to draw up a Framework Strategy for Mediterranean Forests laying down the priorities for action in the face of global changes, there are opportunities in terms of coordination and regional cooperation offered by such international organisations as the Union for the Mediterranean and the Centre for Mediterranean Integration, as well as by the instruments proposed by the main funding bodies, which can provide so much thrust for the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Framework Strategy.

Though there is still room for progress via a more integrated, more participative approach within each country, at present all the constituents appear to be present that are needed to reinforce regional cooperation and enhance the capacity of each country to carry out far-reaching projects for the benefit of Mediterranean forests and woodlands.

The solid, commonly-held base provided by the Framework Strategy for Mediterranean Forests, combined with the chance to reinforce regional dynamic thanks to such international organisations as the Union for the Mediterranean and the Centre for Mediterranean Integration and with the back-up possibilities offered by funding bodies, together make very good conditions for building, now and in concert, a future for Mediterranean forests and woodlands worthy of the challenges and issues that face them. The task is huge... but so was the motivation of all those attending this 4th Mediterranean Forest Week. So let's make a shared commitment to the coming together of all such dynamic forces on behalf of Mediterranean forests!

M.M., E.R.B.

Webography:

All the presentations of the session on:
<http://med.forestweek.org/fr/>
Strategic Framework for Mediterranean Forests (SFMF), State of Mediterranean Forests and Partnership for Collaboration on Mediterranean Forests on <http://www.fao.org/forestry>
Union for the Mediterranean:
<http://ufmsecretariat.org/>
Missions of the Centre for Integration in the Mediterranean Region (CIM):
<http://beta.cmimarseille.org/about/mission>
French Development Agency (AFD):
<http://www.afd.fr/>
Programme of the French Fund for Global Environment (FFEM): <http://www.ffem.fr/>
Turkish Agency for Cooperation and Coordination:
<http://www.tika.gov.tr/en>
Platforms for regional funding:
TerraAfrica : www.terrafrica.org
Congo Basin Forest Fund: www.cbf-fund.org
Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative: www.theggw.net