

FORESTRY SECTOR AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A REFLECTION AFTER THE RABAT FORUM

Jean de Montgolfier, 23 January 2006

The Rabat Forum¹ allowed us to situate the progress made in this area via the 48 communications and case studies presented and the discussions that followed. Obviously, this point is not exhaustive because not all the countries², nor all the issues, were represented on equal terms. Nevertheless, some main ideas and questions emerged.

This paper does not pretend to draw up a full overview of the situation, nor to replace the conclusions and recommendations adopted by the participants at the end of the forum: on the contrary, it is largely based on these recommendations and conclusions. Its aim is merely to supply the elements to set off the 3rd steering committee meeting of the project “*Mediterranean forests and sustainable development*” on the 3rd and 4th February 2006 in Sophia-Antipolis.

A shared vision

Our first observation is that there is a common vision about the Mediterranean woodlands³ shared by a large number of managers, scientists and specialists both internationally and nationally (although all of them do not agree on the terminology “woodlands” or “Mediterranean forests”, especially as translated in French).

This vision is revealed by what can be referred to as paradigmatic statements and is compressed by key concepts, some of which are already old (such as those describing the specificity of the various Mediterranean climates, soils, ecosystems, agrarian systems, ways of

¹ The « Mediterranean forestry sector and sustainable development regional forum: challenges, policies and governance » took place in Rabat from 24 to 26 November 2005. It was organised by the “Haut Commissariat aux Eaux et Forêts et à la Lutte Contre la Désertification ” in the Kingdom of Morocco and by Plan Bleu, in the framework of the partnership established with the FAO with the support of France, following the recommendations of the *Silva Mediterranea* Committee. It brought together more than one hundred managers, specialists and researchers from the Mediterranean countries.

² Out of the 48 communications presented, there was a strong west-east gradient, no doubt largely due to the geographic location. 16 were from the host country, Morocco; 6 from international organisations (UN agencies, large NGOs, etc.); 5 from Spain ; 4 from Algeria ; 4 from Tunisia ; 3 from France ; 3 from Italy ; 2 from Portugal ; 2 from Lebanon ; 1 from Cyprus ; 1 from Turkey ; 1 from Bulgaria.

³ Although the expression itself of *woodlands* is discussed by some authors who prefer the use of *Mediterranean forests*. The ones and others agree in principle: it is necessary to include not only the *matorrals*, *maquis*, *garrigues* in the considered areas, but also the *rangelands* covered with natural vegetation, such as the steppes with perennial plants. While for the first ones, the word *woodlands* evokes much more the production of wood, for the seconds the word *forests* evokes the only large trees. The first expression however has the advantage of corresponding to English wooded Lands, whose statistics of FAO give a precise definition. In addition, the English word *landscape*, in particular with the meaning used in landscape restoration, is very interesting; unfortunately the French word *landscape* has a visual connotation and badly translates its complexity.

life, cultures, and so on) and others which are more recent such as: multiple use, non-commercial use, environmental services, total economic value, multiple players, participation, policy integration, territorial planning, de-concentration, and de-centralisation, global development, sustainable development, policy and project assessment, sustainable management or development indicators, to name but a few.

In this vision, the great principles of sustainable development (long term, equity, effectiveness, management) are theoretically well integrated as principles for the policies and projects intended to implement this vision.

Of course this vision is far from being widespread among the public at large or among stakeholders in the field; considerable awareness-raising and training remains to be carried out; but this vision is starting to be widely shared by the «decision-makers» in the Mediterranean forestry sector. This can be attributed to the work of international organisations, and more especially to that of the FAO.

On the other hand, when the theoretical vision and the general principles have to become more concrete in order to set up policies, the situation is far more contrasted. This diversity can be put down to the variety of cases met and the variety of the economic, social, political, institutional and cultural situations in the Mediterranean countries. Of all the countries and organisations that highlighted the various aspects of the problems, Morocco, with the amount and quality of the communications presented, gave the fullest picture of the situation in a given country, at national level as well as with regard to territories and projects.

Multiple uses and services

Concerning the economic assessment of non commercial uses and environmental services, the work carried out by the MEDFOREX network has demonstrated that there is a fairly wide set of methods, the results of which obviously depend on the available data and on some hypothetical models, and that these methods provide with at least scope for the **total economic value** of woodlands and the ventilation of this scope among the various uses and services, according to the type of area. This very interesting work deserves to be continued and dealt with in depth. It could notably supply some important elements that would contribute to the setting of objectives for forestry planning and management at various levels (country, region, county or *province*, land or territory with a “charter for sustainable forestry development”).

On the other hand, when passing from the economic level to the financial one, the situation can fall short of expectations. For instance, the economic value of the “environmental service” represented by **protection against erosion** ensured by the natural vegetation in watershed basins can be assessed. But the agro-sylvo-pastoral “good practices” carried out by the inhabitants of upstream basins for the benefit of downstream inhabitants are hard to estimate in terms of remuneration. These good practices often entail additional costs (not necessarily monetary ones, but often in terms of work time) and loss of earnings (at least in the short term) for the upstream populations who are often poor; whereas they are of great value for the downstream populations especially as they slow down the speed of the silting of the dams. But how can part of this value be transformed into **remuneration for services rendered**? There is certainly food for thought here, for experiments and exchanges implying numerous dimensions, not only technical and social ones but also social, administrative, legal

ones, or others. Although in contexts that are generally very different, this problem is related to issues such as the ecoconditionality of the European agricultural policy or to some planning and management schemes for the water per watershed basin that are being put in place, in France for instance.

Another example: the connection between agro-sylvo-pastoral good practices that can maintain **biodiversity** and the income that can be earned from all forms of eco-tourism. How can this income be developed and benefit the populations who are often mountain or pastoral and are likely to act in a positive way by their good practices? Some encouraging cases such as those in Morocco have been demonstrated.

Such questions are even more important given that once again it has been acknowledged that wood in the Mediterranean region is not a source of commercial income that is sufficient to finance sustainable forest management. As for products other than wood (fruit, mushrooms, aromatic and medicinal plants, honey, and so on), they are sometimes very interesting resources as long as there are marketing channels, but they are not sufficiently developed. Then there is cork, an emblematic product of the western Mediterranean, whose price fluctuates considerably from high to low in a mysterious way. The repercussions of globalisation and of free-trade on these various markets will no doubt be contrasted: favourable for well identified quality products, unfavourable for mass market products.

A point that has practically not been brought up is that of property rights and customary rights. Yet it would seem that clarification of these rights is essential if the question of remuneration for “environmental services” is to be dealt with: Who has a right to what? Who has to pay? Who should be remunerated? In cases where there are bad practices, to what extent can the principle of “the polluter has to pay” be applied?

Participation and integration

Concerning participation, an approach which is often emphasised in many international and national declarations, the forum proposed some interesting clarifications: Yes, participation is often the key to success for sustainable development or environmental management projects, but it should be real participation, not merely one limited to words or to superficial, apparent agreement by the participants. The stakeholders involved should truly adhere to the projects in question. This generally implies **in-depth work by a facilitating team** that should acquire thorough knowledge of the field and the stakeholders and then gain their confidence and undertake a long process of negotiations during which conflict of opinion cannot be avoided.

Some significant examples were referred to in very different contexts: rural development (North Africa, Turkey), rehabilitation of territory after fires (Portugal), territory charters (France). The methods for setting up and facilitating sustainable development projects at territorial level would seem to be one of the topics for which mutual exchange with other Mediterranean countries could be extremely enriching, especially between the countries of the south and the east, some of which have made considerable progress in this area. Prospective approaches could also be seen as elements of these methods. But it should not be forgotten that more than methods, it is the personal commitment of the actors that conditions the success of these actions. It would seem that coordinators from the world of forestry, thanks to their knowledge of the territory and the people who live there, are often in a good

position to carry out these roles. There is here a great opportunity for many forestry workers to widen their classical tasks to involve global rural development.

A question connected with that of participation, the question of carrying out the projects autonomously was also evoked: it implies using local skills and manpower as much as possible and minimising recourse to external enterprises. This offers the dual advantage of reducing costs and, more especially, of promoting the appropriation of the project by the local population.

Integration of policies for sustainable development and for the environment with the other policies is also an omnipresent topic of debate at least theoretically at both State and regional levels. In reality the situations vary according to the country and the field of action. The case of Spain is very interesting: in this country which is very much decentralised nowadays the forestry policy is the responsibility of the regions or *autonomias*. It would seem that some regions have been successful in the integration of their forestry policy with the other policies for land use planning, whereas others have been much less successful. The development of national or regional forestry plans could be an ideal opportunity for all of the countries to carry out policy integration. But then again, the success of the integration is not automatic; it is the result of a long process of learning, of mutual knowledge, of negotiations and resolutions of conflicts between various authorities at various levels. Exchanges among the Mediterranean countries could prove very fruitful in this area too, although more difficult due to the very political nature of some stakes.

A major problem is that of the landscape integration throughout the Mediterranean region of sustainable development concerns in the planning of town growth and that of infrastructure networks such as transport. This type of planning is often neglected or ineffective. This question goes far beyond the forestry sector and was relatively little mentioned at the forum. It could, however, be considered as a crucial stake and the forests and other natural areas could have a place as essential structuring spaces. Forest workers should, therefore, take a place as the unavoidable partners for the planning and management of the Mediterranean greater city and coastal areas.

Conditions for implementation

A particularly crucial aspect is that of the **financing** of the policies and projects. Financial procedures which are too rigid or too partitioned could be formidable obstacles for the programming and carrying out of integrated actions. Delays in the deployment of funds are often a reason for the demobilising of those concerned and for the loss of participation credibility. This is true not only for the implementation of State or other institutional budgets, but also for bank loans or those from donors. A whole range of exchange and reflection about financial structures and procedures needs to be carried out.

Changing from classical budget procedures that are partitioned according to the nature of the expenditure to innovative procedures that are based on objectives, missions or projects implies moving from “a priori” control to “a posteriori” control. This signifies the setting up of **assessment** procedures and of **indicators** that make these evaluations possible: objectives, means and results indicators from which effectiveness indicators can be calculated (results/objectives ratios) and efficiency indicators (results/means ratios). These assessment indicators cannot be confused with sustainable development indicators that are beginning to

be set up in some countries or around the Mediterranean (Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development and Plan Bleu), but it is clear that the latter will contribute considerably to the former. Progress in the certification or labelling of products, or even of services (tourism), is also very much dependent on the availability of good indicators. The question of indicators and their use is a subject that is very promising for exchange and cooperation.

From a **technical point of view**, the forum insisted especially on the necessity of replacing the interventions in relation to their social and economic objectives, and on the interest of a global, ecosystem approach of the “landscape restoration” type. Contributions from ecology engineers were also emphasised. These techniques have been developed especially in mountainous or temperate regions and at present they are being adapted to the Mediterranean conditions. Here too, exchange could quickly prove to be fruitful.

Questions about **training** also had an important position during the forum. On one hand the training of forestry staff to get them ready for the new tasks ahead. On the other hand the training of those called on to participate in development tasks involving forestry aspects, from local government officials to farmers and breeders, as well as technicians, professionals in the field, administrative executives, and so on. It was especially pointed out that training is even more effective if it is “at ground level” and is based on real problems encountered by the people to be trained. This puts into perspective the interest of “standard” training and justifies targeted training that is fine-tuned to meet the needs of those involved. Such training obviously requires considerable preparatory work and thus costs more, but the effectiveness and especially the long-term effects on the future behaviour of those benefiting from the training depend on it. Training could be integrated in “capacity-building” processes, the necessity of which has been emphasised, that could encourage profitable exchange. As for research, this is an area where cooperation has been well established for a long time; exchange has to be continued, sometimes intensified or to be restarted or even set up for some innovative topics.

How can the forum be followed up?

The list of points above attempts to synthesise the progress made, but also the shortfalls that were observed during the forum. The list could seem long, but it should not be forgotten that all these aspects are included in a coherent vision shared by the participants. Moreover, this list does not pretend to be exhaustive. Its aim is to help the Steering committee with its work to determine the continuation of the project in the context of *Silva Mediterranea*. Thus, during the Steering committee meeting, it would be appropriate to complete the list and to put the topics in their order of importance.

In order to do that, the committee’s reflections should be based on the **conclusions and recommendations** text that was adopted by the forum . The directions and actions proposed in this text are of a varied nature: at one extreme some of them bear on the implementing of principles, whereas at the other concrete actions can be found (including the holding of this meeting, etc.). They are also intended for a large range of actors (international bodies, local governments, people in the field, researchers, instructors, and so on). It is therefore essential for our Steering committee to work on them again in order to obtain a work schedule that can be carried out in the framework of the *Mediterranean forests and sustainable development* project.

Besides this, several of the directions and assignments proposed by the forum bear on topics such as the prevention of forest fires, sustainable cork management, synergy between research centres, etc. which are at the heart of other issues dealt with by **other *Silva Mediterranea* topic groups**. A more precise discussion of these points is to take place during the informal meeting held the next day at the initiative of the chairman of *Silva Mediterranea* committee. Naturally, close coordination of these groups with the MFSD project is obviously essential.

Close coordination is also necessary between the MFSD project and other projects led by Plan Bleu in the framework of the Mediterranean Commission for Sustainable Development ⁴ (MCSD), especially the project for **sustainable rural development** planned for 2007-2008. This could be done by looking more deeply into the relationships between forest areas, good agro-sylvo-pastoral practices, the production of environmental services and public assets. Case studies could help progress especially by emphasising i) new integrated and participative territorial approaches, ii) the fight against desertification and against poverty, iii) the obstacles to cross and the instruments to be put in place, especially provide with financial flexible tools, “a posteriori” control, indicators, and so on.

⁴ MAP (Mediterranean Action Plan) and the Plan Bleu produced for the MCSD a reference document : The Mediterranean Strategy of Sustainable Development, which was adopted by the countries of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership at their meeting in Barcelona, November 25th , 2005.