

Day 2: Tuesday 15 May

9:15 – 10:30

Session 5: Custodians of terrestrial ecosystems

Discussion questions

1. **How can custodians of terrestrial ecosystems be empowered to play a stronger role in achieving SDG15 - including local communities and Indigenous Peoples, primary and smallscale producers, farmers, pastoralists, foresters and fisherfolk, women and youth?**

99% of Turkey's forests lands are owned by the State. Approximately 7 million forest villagers inhabit the 22.661 forest villages within these forest lands. The ratio of forest villagers to the remaining of the population is 9%. Forest villagers survive on forestry, animal husbandry, and limited agricultural practices. Forest villagers do not own sufficient agricultural lands. Income per capita in forest villages is below the national average. Forest villagers mostly lack any social securities and constitute the most disadvantaged group.

Forest villagers are protected under the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey. Forest management is administered by the General Directorate of Forestry, a powerful institution with directorates all across country. Involvement of forest villagers is ensured in the protection, use, and improvement of forests. The General Directorate of Forestry employs forest villagers in the production of timber raw materials and non-timber forest products, as well as in afforestation, sapling production, and forest maintenance and protection activities. Forest villagers are significant stakeholders in the management of forest resources in Turkey.

The ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs aims local development of forest villagers. To this end, ORKÖY provides grants and loans to forest villagers and agriculture-forest development cooperatives. ORKÖY support is provided under two categories, namely economic and social projects.

Within the scope of economic projects; forest villagers are supported in activities including viniculture, orchard, feeder cattle husbandry, dairy cattle husbandry, dairy sheep husbandry, buffalo breeding, boarding houses, thyme and sage production, greenhouse production, beekeeping, fungiculture, and medicinal and aromatic plants production. Interest rates are not applied for 99% of loans provided for economic projects. In 2017, total support to 9,383 families reached 37.5 million dollars, comprised of 30 million dollars in loan and 7.5 million dollars in grants. Economic supports provided to 6,221 families ensured 66.124 man/month employment.

Within the scope of social forestry projects; living conditions of forest villagers are improved, while village culture is protected and sustained through activities including exterior wall insulation to forest villagers' houses, solar powered water heating system, solid fuel radiator system, roof covers, handicrafts for women, village fountain and oven for common use, and a village meeting hall to be used for trainings regarding project activities. Loans are provided with zero interest rate for social forestry projects, and return periods vary between 3-7 years based on project type. Between 2004-2016,

293.8 million Turkish Liras in solar power loans was provided to 141.427 families. The project ensured 710.000 steres of efficiency in firewood, and improved living conditions of 565.748 forest villagers. Additionally, grants are provided to integrated projects that aim for an increase in the income of forest villagers, and afforestation and rehabilitation of forestlands.

In addition to individual supports, cooperatives established in forest villages also benefit from supports. Approximately 4.000 agriculture-forest cooperatives in forest villages comprise over 400 thousand members. These cooperatives function mostly in the production of forest products and in other forestry activities including afforestation works. With a view to increase their efficiency, required equipment is provided with low interest rate loans.

The goals are to ensure local development by enhancing living conditions and prosperity of forest villagers, and to contribute to SDGs by relieving the stress on terrestrial ecosystems.

2. How can custodians of terrestrial ecosystems be more effectively supported in balancing the need to address poverty, hunger, secure livelihoods and opportunities for development with the need to save the environment, addressing environmental degradation and a changing climate?

One of the most efficient methods of ensuring local development for forest villagers is to create employment opportunities in the production of forest products. Forest villagers comprise a significant workforce in the production of timber raw materials. On the other hand, government subventions to certain forest products to be offered with low-costs, after production, to forest villagers is a significant economic gain for villagers.

The General Directorate of Forestry, within the scope of functional planning, ensures participatory planning of forest resources by gathering requests and opinions from forest villagers. A particular emphasis is placed on preventing any contradictions between forestry activities and animal husbandry or other agricultural practices of villagers.

3. What policy and legislative framework changes and investments are needed to further strengthen existing mechanisms and partnerships to provide an enabling environment for custodians of terrestrial ecosystems to effectively up-scale more sustainable practices?

Turkish forestry focuses on the development of forest villagers in policy and strategy formulation processes, as well as in the decision-making and implementation processes in planning and management of forest resources.

Furthermore, traditional policies and strategies of the Forestry Directorate have always aimed to support forest villagers. However, sustainability of supported projects could not be maintained over time due to various reasons.

There have been temporary challenges in the development of forest villagers including the General Directorate of Forestry occasionally being alone in its efforts,

insufficiencies in inter-institutional coordination, insufficient dissemination and education services to forest villagers, low scale and inefficiency of activities for forest villages, distance from markets, lack of entrepreneurship, lack of institutionalisation habit, and insufficient financing.

Activities of various government institutions are often uncoordinated, and they lack necessary communication and integration.

Sensitivity and efforts towards conservation of natural resources of the majority of civil society organisations have not sufficiently covered the protection of local communities or the reduction of rural poverty.

Even so, several projects have recently been formulated within the scope of development plans, to harmonise the differences in regional and sectorial development levels in Turkey. Additionally, Turkey strives to fulfil her commitments in international conventions, and to become a leading country in her efforts.

Below policy and strategy suggestions have been put forth to resolve issues:

- Increasing loan and grant support and efficiency to reduce poverty in forest villages;
- Enhancing benefits/income opportunities obtained from forest products;
- Increasing use of forest villagers of said benefits;
- Strengthening cooperation with other government institutions and civil society organisations to ensure their participation and contribution in reducing poverty in forest villages;
- Giving highest consideration to gender mainstreaming in activities carried out in forest villages;
- Enhancing expertise and professional competencies in forestry to increase workforce efficiency;
- Training villagers to develop entrepreneurship, and increasing institutionalisation capacity of forest villagers;
- In addition to above-described efforts of the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs to develop policies, and the 3.5 billion dollars of direct contributions provided to forestry activities during 15 years; an additional 1 billion dollars of income is envisioned to forest villagers for the years 2018 and 2019.
- President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has initiated a mobilisation plan, titled “5 Thousand Income-generating Forests in 5 Thousand Villages”, for the local development of forest villagers. Within this scope, forests comprising walnut, almond and pine trees will be established. These activities will provide forest villagers with an additional 2 billion dollars of income.
- Afforestation and forest rehabilitation works increased fivefold since 2003. We worked on 5 million hectares of land, planting 4 billion 50 million saplings, and thus increasing the income levels of forest villagers.
- We increased the export income obtained from our non-timber forest products including thyme, sage, laurel, and locust bean to 507 million dollars. Our target is to increase export to 5 billion dollars by 2023. This will further increase the share of forest villagers.
- With a view to improve forestry activities and to provide forest villagers with an income, we formulated and implemented 31 Action Plans regarding

productions of Walnut, Almond, Chestnut, Mulberry, Anatolian Orchid, and Truffles.

- As of the end of 2017, we established 407 Honey Forests. As a result of supports provided to beekeeping and honey production, Turkey moved up from the 6th spot to 2nd in global honey production. We will increase the number of Honey Forests to 700 through our future activities. The income levels of forest villagers will thus further increase.
- With a view to protect local communities inhabiting protected areas from the potential limitations of protective measures, eco-tourism and other income-generating activities will be conducted to support local communities.
- All hunting grounds in Turkey have been registered as hunting zones, and planned hunting is enforced. Hunting tourism development areas will be established to benefit and to create economic gains from the wide range of wildlife in Turkey. Approximately 80% of the income generated from hunting activities are allocated to forest villagers.
- The 7.484 facilities we inaugurated over the past 15 years include 525 dam reservoirs; 1.232 irrigation facilities; 207 drinking and domestic use water provision facilities; waste water treatment facilities; and 4.640 overflow protection facilities. We provide irrigation to our productive lands, and support farmers as well as local communities.
- We aim to share Turkey's experiences with particularly African countries, to mainstream best practices, and to contribute in capacity-building in other countries through model projects.
- We launched the "Ankara Initiative" during COP 12 with a view to support the implementation of UNCCD. This initiative aims not only to contribute to world peace, but also to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) to enhance prosperity of local communities in areas affected by desertification and land degradation.