

CASE STUDY 14

PROMOTING LOCAL DECISION MAKING, IMPROVING MANAGEMENT OF FOREST AND PASTURE AREAS - ALBANIA

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Sector: Forestry

CONTEXT

Forests and pastures cover 56% of land in Albania and are the predominant land use in mountainous areas. These are crucial for meeting the daily needs of people in rural and upland areas, accounting for nearly 70% of winter energy needs, local building material and providing income from trade in non-timber products, such as medicinal plants and nuts. In rural areas, there is a high dependency on natural resources, from forests, pastures, agriculture and livestock rearing. Low value and poor quality products combined with poor infrastructure, poor access to markets, inadequate basic services, limited capacity, results in few opportunities to generate income to improve livelihoods and well-being. With limited alternative livelihood options, there are strong links between poverty and environmental degradation.

Addressing insecure property rights and promoting sustainable utilisation of natural resources in upland areas is considered a key factor in reducing environmental degradation and improving the incomes of rural families. Recognising this, the Albanian Government undertook a major programme of transferring the ownership of forests and pastures from the State to local government structures (Communes). Part of the transfer process included the establishment of Forests and Pastures Users' Associations to represent interests of local communities.

SNV has been at the forefront of supporting collaborative forest management and empowering local community groups representing forestry users in Albania since 1999. Early work in the region of Diber, followed Korca and Kukes included the formation of Regional Federations and later, a National Association of Forest and Pasture Users to lobby and represent the interests of local forests and pasture users.

The World Bank with various co-financing partners have supported a number of projects with the Albanian Government to promote participatory approaches and measures to restore land productivity. Interest in the approach of SNV with empowering local organisations resulted in SNV being invited to implement the capacity building component of the Natural Resources Management Project (NRDP) 2006-2011. This covered: organisation and strengthening the capacity of Forest and Pasture User Associations (FPUAs) and Communes, building the capacity of regional federations, and strengthening collaborative mechanisms between regional and national organisations. The approach followed focussed on strengthening the capacity of regional federations as local capacity builders and working through local trainers for community level programmes.

The programme contributes to two key pillars of the government's National Strategy for Socio-Economic Development. It is consistent with the National Environmental Action Plan and it supports the three key elements of the World Bank Country Assistance Strategy: 1) poverty alleviation and human development; 2) sustainable private sector led growth in hilly and mountainous areas; and 3) improved governance and institution building, with a focus on building the capacity of communes and user associations to manage resources sustainably and transparently. In addition it supports Government institutions at central, regional and local level to support sustainable natural resources management.

Communal forests and pastures have a distinctive feature of their management that they encompass many actors at various levels, from local to national.

CLIENTS AND PARTNERS

Previous direct control of the State, resulted in unclear or overlapping responsibilities and obligations, which led to conflicts and unsustainable land use practices. Local communities, community groups through support of umbrella organisations have been empowered and assisted to take responsibility for managing their resources and to be able to negotiate with other local actors, including national and local government representatives. Support has focused on a mixture of civil society, local government and state institutions:

- * 248 Forest and Pastures Users Associations at commune level;
- * 10 regional federations;
- * 1 National Association;
- * 248 Local Governments (Communes);
- * 36 District Forest Service (DFS) offices;
- * Ministry of Environment, Forest and Water Administration.

The decentralisation process through transfer of communal forests and pastures areas to communes presents a number of capacity challenges in the short term. Firstly, the skills and capacities of the new owner/managers of these forests at Local Government level in terms of technical forest and pasture management and perhaps more importantly in terms of economic planning and administrative skills. Secondly, with regards to the state forestry agents (currently represented by DFS) whose role changes from direct management and control, to one of technical, policy and legal advisory support to the new managers. Civil society, forest and pasture user associations, federations of forest user and the National Association of Communal Forest and Pastures have an important role to play in advocacy and lobbying and ensuring open communication and accountability of decision makers and elected representatives, raising awareness, providing voice and representation to the rural poor and other disempowered groups.

Although the situation does not yet provide for ownership rights to individual forest and pasture users, this decentralisation of authority is expected to provide for greater recognition and respect more fully, the rights of the primary stakeholders, the traditional forest families as local custodians of the resource. However, this is not assured and as such, economic activities from traditional areas of communal forests and pastures without official sanction are effectively illegal

Other actors include the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Water Administration (MEFWA), Forestry Faculty, the Regional Governments (Qarks), NGOs, Private Sector and Schools have a role in coordination, conflict managements, training, information and awareness.

Funding partners are: World Bank, Sida, GEF, EU, Albanian government and SNV.

The logic of the intervention is such that building capacity of local forest related organisations to manage forests as well as collaborate with other actors in communal forest and pasture areas will result in improved decentralised management and better secured property rights including sustainable livelihood opportunities for rural households.

The capacity development approach placed emphasis on building the capacity of the regional federations of forest users as local capacity builders for their member associations, using the 'trainers of trainers' principle, to build ownership of the process and support sustainability.

SNV's method included working through multidisciplinary teams of advisers, providing advisory services to a combination of strategic actors at meso and macro level, covering government, civil society and the private sector. Methods and tools varied according to the specific needs of the client groups. These included: participatory (problem) analysis, planning, monitoring and evaluation, facilitation of multi-stakeholder processes, facilitation of (organisational) self-assessments, trainings for adults (theoretical and practical), structured (facilitated) discussions, seminars and round table debates, field visits and practical exercises, coaching and 'on the job' training.

OUTCOME

The capacity building programme was developed based on a needs assessment conducted in 2006, with visits to over 285 villages by a team of 44 interviewers, three round table discussions at national level and subsequently implemented nationwide. Sessions covered: awareness of communal forestry issues at village level (2265 villages in 248 communes); strengthening of management capacity of elected FPUA boards (3,600 members); training approximately 300 forestry technicians; and strengthening regional networks of FPUAs in representative federations of forest and pasture users (10), as well as the umbrella National Association.

Support to the project had 3 key outcomes envisaged: 1) Strengthened FPUA's capacity to be effective & sustainable in the management of communal forests & pastures; 2) Strengthened Federations of Forest and Pasture Users Associations at regional and national level; and 3) Strengthened networking and communication channels between FPUAs and Federations at all levels enabling them to learn, act, plan, and lobby together creating more synergy in communal forest management. These can also be measured in terms of the outreach of clients to rural families, and improved service delivery by these local organisations.

Over the 5 years of the project, a total of 4,850 trainings were delivered to all FPUAs and Regional Federations and over 65,000 community members participated in these different meetings and trainings. 110 new FPUAs were established along with 6 new regional federations along with strengthening structures of existing ones including election processes. The following has been observed and recorded:

- Increased participation and interest of local people (including women) in natural resources management;
- Improved cooperation between FPUAs and FPUAs with communes;
- Regular networking channels established at communal, regional & national level that enable FPUAs and RFs to learn, act, plan and lobby together;
- National Association and Regional Federations are lobbying for the revision of legal framework including continuation of the decentralisation process and for greater economic rights for local users;
- A number of Regional Federations and FPUAs have taken the initiative to apply for project funding, others have made initial steps of providing extension services to their members;

The improved dialogue between sector actors has created a basis for improving the enabling environment for equitable local sustainable economic development for improved management of communal forest and pasture areas in Albania.

IMPACT

The project development objective is to establish or maintain sustainable, community-based natural resource management in 248 communes in upland and mountainous erosion-prone lands. This will lead to enhanced productivity and incomes derived from sustainable resource management, reduced soil degradation, improved water management, conservation of biodiversity, and strengthened public sector management of these resources.

The component supported by SNV is part of a wider national project which is internally and externally evaluated. While final impact assessments are awaited, it is considered that improved stakeholder participation in the management and control of communal forest and pasture areas has resulted in a five fold increase in annual values in terms of forest products available for rural households. This does not include the enhanced environmental services and carbon sequestration values that are associated with improved land management and increased forest cover.

While it is still early to assess the full impact of the project interventions, many of necessary requirements for an improved enabling environment both vertical: from communities to Ministries, and horizontal: between local actors, are in place and provide a solid platform for future development.

LESSONS LEARNED

SUSTAINABILITY

A range of learning was generated through the capacity development programme. These include:

- Focussing the training at grassroots level (village) increased people's interest and participation, improved their involvement in decision making, making the process more sustainable in the longer term;
- Use of local trainers and local capacity builders made possible the delivery of over 4,800 trainings to all levels whilst increasing the knowledge and skills of the LCBs - Regional Federations and their membership the FPUAs;
- An extensive and broad nationwide training (covering all Albania) required good planning, budgeting and coordination at all levels and actors.
- Training methods, approach and techniques were adapted according to social, economic, cultural conditions and traditions of rural people in order to achieve maximal interest.
- Sustainable management can only be achieved when users gain rights (civil and economic) recognised by law and understood by both individuals and organisations. Local capacity needs to be backed by an enabling policy, legal and institutional framework.

The project builds on successful features of forest and pasture management initiated under an earlier Albanian Forestry Programme as well as SNV interventions with local groups in the 1990's. These supported the transfer of user rights to communes and assisted local communities to manage natural resources and participate in decision making over the use of communal forest and pasture areas. The Government of Albania is committed to scaling up coverage of communal forest and pasture management throughout the country. The adoption and mainstreaming of community-based natural resource management in the context of the Government's broader programme of decentralisation will further support sustainability.

At the end of the capacity building programme, it is considered by all actors that Forests and Pastures Users Associations are one of the key actors for sustainable development of Communal Forestry in Albania. They have clear mandate to represent the interests of local users, act as an instrument for the users capacity development and participation in decision making. The strengthened structures of the National Association and Regional Federations is assuring proper representation and service delivery for FPUAs and users as well as lobbying for more secure rights. In many cases, families are already deriving benefits from the use of forest and pastures that had been seriously degraded and brought under improved local management.

PHOTOS AND QUOTES

"The mission would like to acknowledge the achievements and the great contribution of SNV to the project. Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs through SNV has contributed with more than \$1 million to achieve greater impact of the capacity building performed in connection with NRDP. SNV has also provided technical support to the supervision team as well as the PMT." - **Mid term review WB-Sida Mission, June 2008.**

Regional Federation of Berati, "We have never seen before such broad and professional training that enabled us to understand the integral part Communal Forest and Pasture Management, we would like this support and partnership to continue for ever"

National Forest Association; "SNV support through capacity building program was crucial for establishment and functioning of all FPUAs and their federations, it was not



just a capacity building program but a school for the sustainable communal forest and pasture management”

“The result of the training has been evidenced by the successful forest pasture management planning process, higher awareness and keen interests by the sampled villages visited during the field visits.” Aide-Memoire, **Supervision mission**, January 19-28, 2009



STANDARD DATA

- Start and end date of the contract within which the intervention(s) occurred.
1st July 2006 till 30th September 2010
- Composition of the team: **15 SNV-staff-, 20-LCBs and 3 external consultants.**
- Number of PP-days already invested per category (6,300 SNV staff/ 3,500 LCB/ 90 days external consultant);
- The financial resources invested. \$1,748,880 [WB, \$711,880, SNV \$1,045,000;
- Client satisfaction and enhanced capacity scores (scores on outcome and impact):

Client quality appreciation: 19.

Format scoring on progress in outcome: 3.4