

F O R E S T S

Forestry Project Albania

- › CAPACITY BUILDING
- › COLLABORATIVE
MANAGEMENT
- › ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITY
- › SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE AND
RURAL DEVELOPMENT



Background and rationale

Forests cover less than 40% of the land area of Albania. Some areas of other wooded land are included in the calculations of forest cover, half of which is classified as coppice and coppice with standards, the other half being high forest. Nearly four-fifths of the growing stock consists of broad-leaved species, predominantly species of deciduous and evergreen oak and of beech. Albania is one of the few European countries where there has been a decline in forest area in recent decades, due to clearance for agriculture, overgrazing and cutting for fuel-wood, in particular during the transition period (around 1990). Tree felling has exceeded net annual increment, resulting in a decrease in the growing stock; there has also been a decline in its quality as a result of illegal cutting. Most of the forest is available for wood supply; of the rest, the larger part is not available for economic reasons. More than four-fifths of the forest is classified as semi-natural, with the remainder divided between forest undisturbed by man and plantations.

The Country has had forestation programmes, with tree planting mainly on difficult land, but at present they are reduced due to a lack of investment in this area. All forest is State-owned, but tenure regime is changing to include community and private forest categories. There are efforts to increase the area of protected forest in order to preserve the rich biodiversity and the landscape. Protected Areas account for more than 100 thousand hectares, and will be increasing due to the Hill and Mountainous Terrain and Genetic Conservation Programme. During the 1990s, and despite the fact that forest management was particularly affected by the sudden demise of the former economy, the forestry sector did not receive sufficient assistance. However, the sector's productive capacity has the potential to be restored so as to play an important role for rural employment, industrial development, and environment preservation. The Government of Albania thus asked the World Bank and the Italian Government to contribute to the funding of a Forestry Project. The World Bank contributes to this

initiative through a soft loan of US\$ 8,000,000. Donations come from the Government of Italy, a grant of US\$ 8,500,000, and the Government of Switzerland, a grant of US\$ 450,000. Furthermore, Italy also finances through the Italy/FAO Trust Fund the "Technical Assistance to the Albanian Forestry Project", which provides technical assistance for the implementation of the wider project. The Italy/FAO project budget is US\$ 2.5 million and the selected components for this intervention are the institutional development of the forest administration, and improved management of State forests.

Goal, objectives and expected outputs

Within the framework of the Albanian Government's policy objectives, the Forestry Project development goal is to support the achievement of a sustainable increase in the productivity of forest and pasture areas and the empowering of local governments.

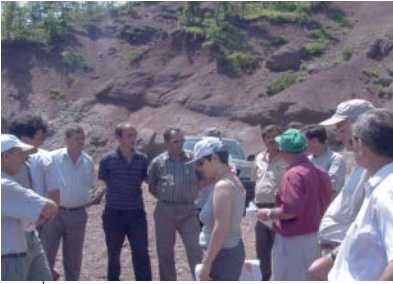
Specific objectives are defined in the Project document as follows.

- Restore degraded State-owned forest and pasture areas and promote their sustainable use.
- Promote conservation of natural forest ecosystems.
- Take the initial steps in the transition of the forestry/pasture sector to a market economy, separating commercial from regulatory functions and establishing mechanisms for the self-financing of commercial activities.



Albanian hill farm in the rugged and mountainous eastern district of Peshkopi

Cover photo: view of valley floor from path leading to hillside village of Lebeche near the town of Berat



The severely eroded experimental area in Qender Commune, Librazhd Forest District. Here the activities are a collective effort among the DGFP, local government, Forestry Project, FAO-TA, and the Watershed Assessment Project

The Albania Forestry Project is an integrated project combining all aspects of forest resources administration, management and protection and consists of the following four components.

● **Institutional strengthening**

The focus of this component is on the reorganization and strengthening of the Directorate General of Forests and Pastures (DGFP) by decentralising its management structure to the regional level, by developing the capacity to handle its new roles in communal forest and pasture management and administration, and by introducing skills required for effectively operating in a market economy. This component also supports training, education and research activities in the forest and pasture sector and develops and strengthens environmental management capabilities within the sector. Project management and technical assistance are included in this component.

● **Sustainable forest management**

The focus of this component is on improving State forest management and protection by strengthening the capabilities of field services. Through this component, forest management

planning activities are being resumed using current technologies and methodologies for forest resources management and planning. Field activities such as the reforestation of sensitive areas, pre-commercial thinning, forest protection and pest monitoring, are implemented under this component.

● **Communal forest and pasture management**

The focus of this component is on rehabilitating and increasing the productivity of silvo-pastoral areas close to villages and communities in order to meet fuel-wood requirements of the local population and the fodder requirements of their livestock. This component also includes the development of non-wood forest products and the protection and restoration of natural ecosystems, particularly through erosion control. This component supports the initiation and development of communal management in these areas. Resources are clearly allocated to local beneficiaries so as to encourage sustainable resources management through empowerment and active participation of the users in decision-making and management.

● **Protected Area management**

This component focuses on strengthening and improving the DGFP's capability to manage Protected Areas in an environmentally sustainable manner. Important issues under this component are the strengthening of communications, the provision of appropriate equipment, technical assistance and training for some priority districts, the development of a sustainable model and framework for Protected Areas management and biodiversity protection, and the development of a pilot management plan for a major national park.

All together, these components are expected to have a direct and positive impact on the productivity of forest and pasture areas, on the reduction of erosion and the protection of the many irrigation schemes spread in rural areas. Project activities are also expected to lead to a more rational use of pasture-land and to halt the current degradation process that is most threatening biodiversity and the sustainability of ecosystems. At the same time the Project is supporting the Government's decentralisation efforts and is facilitating the actual transfer of forests and pastures to the communes. It is also strengthening capacities at all levels in the forestry and pasture sector. The Forestry Project is under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, implemented by the Directorate General of Forests and Pastures and managed by the Project Management Unit. Project activities, particularly those carried out under the "Sustainable forest and pasture management" and the "Communal forest and pasture management" components, are carried out throughout Albania. In general, field activities are being awarded to private contractors and to forest users' associations. The private companies and the associations generally engage local workers to perform the fieldwork.

Implementation and results

Although the Project was scheduled to start operations in 1996, the civil unrest which spread in that period caused a delay and activities effectively started in October 1997. The activities are now scheduled to be completed by the end of 2003 (including a one-year project extension which is under consideration). The last Project Joint Supervision Mission which took place in December 2001, highlighted the significant progress reached by the Project during that year. Most notably,



*Left:
decentralisation meeting
in the pilot region
(Elbasan)*

*Right:
Shkrel Commune,
reforestation area*

in relation to institutional reform and decentralisation, two new Directorates were created within DGFP (the Directorate for Communal Forest and Pastures, and Extension Services and Protected Areas Management), and a decree was issued in September 2001 to set up a Regional Office in the Pilot Region (Elbasan). Within the institutional component, the strengthening of the Shkodra Forest Technical School has been supported through the development of a significantly revised didactical programme and the development of new course materials. Assistance was also provided to the Forest and Pasture Research Institute (FPRI) and to the Environmental Project Management Unit (PEMU) through capacity building. In addition, the National Forest Inventory, planned for implementation during the last two years of project activities, was recently initiated.

As for the second component (Sustainable forest management), thirteen management plans have been completed and approved. Eight of these are being implemented while five are under preparation. The data collection for eleven additional management plans has also been completed. In support of better resources management, monitoring and control, significant investments were made in acquiring vehicles, motorcycles and radio-communication and office equipment for DGFP headquarters and for the district offices. Significant investments were also made in improving the working environment for forest service staff through rehabilitation of offices. An extensive training programme and technical assistance were provided to all stakeholders in the forest and pasture sector.

As for illegal logging, there seems to be a reduction from the previous year, but data is not always consistent. A revision of the strategic action plan against illegal logging is needed. Contracts for the rehabilitation of forest roads in two areas have been awarded. Moreover, the thinning programme has progressed significantly both qualitatively and quantitatively: in 2001 the thinned area measured 2,621 ha. Finally, following recommendations from the last mission held in May 2001, a draft proposal for a National Forest Fire Management Strategy and Action Plan was prepared by national forest fire experts with the Project assistance, and a marketing and pricing policy study was recently concluded. This study was expected to lay the foundation for a thorough reform of the marketing methods in Albania and complement the overall institutional reform of the forestry sector. In 2002, the Forestry Project Impact Assessment on Poverty Reduction was launched, following recommendations from the December 2001 Joint Steering Committee. The study focuses on the activities of the Forestry Project and is the first similar project assessment in the Albanian forest sector. It attempts to quantitatively measure the impact of this Project on poverty in Albania. The findings of this analysis will be presented at a national conference and will hopefully serve as a tool for the assessment of other projects' impact on the incidence of poverty in Albania.

The implementation of the "Communal forest and pasture management" component has further accelerated and has far exceeded expectations. As a result, there are visible improvements in forests and pastures, reduced erosion, increased awareness of local population on forest protection and increased self-governance and decision-making capacities in civil society. The component has also contributed significantly to reducing poverty and fewer people have migrated for seasonal jobs.



A large number of villages have applied to the programme, more than present resources can cover: 200 out of 330 communes have applied for financial support but the Project, in collaboration with the other donors, can only work with 130 communes at the moment. As for the last component, the development of a pilot management plan for a major national park (Dajti National Park) is under preparation, while the construction of visiting centres for several other parks has already been completed. One of the most significant contributions of the Project has been to encourage public information and awareness, and to engage all stakeholders in a participatory resources management mode. A public information strategy and action plan has been developed and partially implemented. Presently, the Albanian Forestry Project receives increasing attention from other donors, and co-funding is being offered by IFAD, WFP, USAID and DFID. The Mission Report states that the Project has substantially contributed to the tangible improvement of natural resources as well as to the Government's efforts to reduce poverty.

DESCRIPTION OF THE FOREST AND PASTURE TRANSFER SCHEME

The transfer process (scheme) is based on the Law "On Forests and Forest Service Police" (No. 7623 dated 13/10/1992) and Regulation "On the Transfer of Forests and Pastures in Use to Communes" (No. 308, dated January 1996). According to these legal acts "The communal forests and pastures would be given to users who are permanent inhabitant of the Commune. The agreement - signed contract between the Commune and the users - gives the latter the full rights to all benefits from communal forests and pastures transferred to the Commune.