

The economic benefits of sustainable forestry in the Mediterranean region

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Mediterranean forests provide local communities with a diverse range of products such as wood, fodder for livestock and plants and game, all of which contribute to food security and help to alleviate poverty in rural regions. However, these forests will be one of the most affected ecosystems in the near future as temperatures increase and rains decrease. In order to avoid the Mediterranean region turning into a desert, expert forest management is required.

This then is the goal of the Mediterranean Network of Forestry Research and Innovation (MENFRI), an EU-funded project which began in December 2013 that aims to establish a platform for dialogue and action to improve forestry practices on both sides of the Mediterranean. Indeed

it is clear that the region, defined as the triangle that links Mediterranean Europe with North Africa and the Middle East, needs more research, education and innovation in order to sustainably generate products and services that contribute to local economies.

Furthermore, the 73 million hectares of unique natural heritage that constitute the Mediterranean's forests and woodlands are home to numerous species of plants and animals. Climate change threatens many rare and endangered species with extinction.

In order to address the issue of climate change effectively - and to identify untapped economic potential - the project began by identifying key trends and patterns across the region. It found that to the north, abandonment in terms of [forest management](#) and maintenance was a key issue. To the south, overgrazing and desertification were identified as the main threats.

Bridging the gap between such research findings and the implementation of actual policies and schemes that achieve sustainable improvements to both the environment and the local economy is the next challenge. Indeed, [job creation](#) is central to the three-year project. The economic benefits of good forest management must be promoted better in order to encourage sustainable practices that will have long term environmental benefits. This means demonstrating the added value of Mediterranean forests, tapping into their economic potential and realising opportunities for local communities to profit from their natural resources.

In order to effect such change however, these [local communities](#) need access to knowledge and outside expertise. This is why in May 2014, MENFRI invited experts from different countries and backgrounds to gather in Morocco to discuss how forestry sectors are organised, share best practices and identify potential new practical opportunities in job creation. By setting up a discussion platform and organising meetings

such as this, MENFRI hopes to encourage different countries to share their experiences in the face of a common global challenge.

Sustainable forest management also needs to be tackled at the EU level. Without a coherent political strategy, any improvements achieved at the local level will disappear in the face of such a monumental global challenge as [climate change](#). The coordination of actions across the Mediterranean region is therefore another important aspect of MENFRI, and one that will have a long-lasting impact. The project is due for completion in November 2016.

Provided by CORDIS

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